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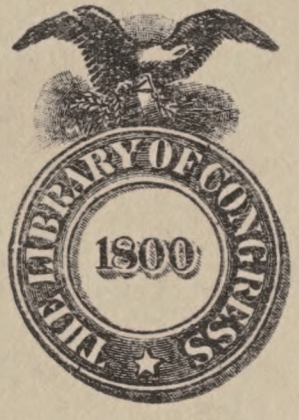

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"WE'RE BITTER RIVALS"

NANCY LEE'S SPRING TERM

By

MARGARET WARDE pseud.

Author of
THE "BETTY WALES' BOOKS"
NANCY LEE

Dunton, Edith Kellogg.

Illustrated by
PEMBERTON GINTHER

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Introduction

THE "I-Forgot Girl" who plays the leading part in this story made her first appearance in "Nancy Lee," which tells about her coming to Fair Oaks School and her adventures there until she went home—in borrowed clothes—for her spring vacation. There was begun the story of the Princess and of Prince Charming, who went to live with the Princess in her Enchanted Castle; and there were introduced also the Terrible Twins, and Lloyd, Mary, Grace, Vera, and others, who appear again in this book.

Maybe, when you get to the last page of this Spring Term story, you will think it ends too soon. Maybe you will want very much to know what happened next to Nancy and her friends and that adorable young person named Timmy. Well, you shall! But you see those things don't belong in the Spring Term story. They belong in "Nancy Lee's Summer," which is the name of the third book about "Miss I-Forgot" Nancy Lee. Just to get you a little bit interested in it, I'll tell you that the Terrible Twins have a part in Nancy's summer adventures, and staid Margaret Lewis, and Lloyd

Mallory, also known as "Miss Oddity" and funny little Jeanne Durand from France, and Timmy, of course. No summer could be complete without Timmy.

MARGARET WARDE.

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Nancy Lee's Spring Term

CHAPTER I

SPRING TERM EXCITEMENTS

"HELLO, Jane-and-Christina! May I come in?" cried Nancy Lee from the open door of the Learned Twins' Unmixed Study. It was "come-back day" for spring term at Fair Oaks School, which meant that you must appear in your place at dinner, and until then might do exactly as you liked, though of course it was only sensible to spend the time unpacking.

"Of course, you old dear!" little Christina assured Nancy, rushing over to give her a rapturous hug.

"It rather looks as if you'd have to sit on the floor," added tall Jane, with a welcoming grin and a hearty hand-shake. "I've unpacked all over the place, regardless. And what's the news of N. Lee?"

Nancy curled up comfortably on the floor, in a corner that had miraculously escaped the flood of

Jane's possessions. "I should think you had unpacked all over the place, Jane," she observed gaily. "You'd better call this the Mixed Study to-day. My trunk hasn't come yet. Isn't that perfectly maddening? Now I shall have to unpack in a regular rush to-morrow, and I'd meant to be so slow and careful and particular about it, for a good start at keeping things neat and tidy. Did you get my letter?"

"With the lovely tale of the crowning misadventures of an I-Forgot Girl," Jane took her up, "and resulting moral reflections. We did. And we are prepared to assist you, dear Triangler, to keep all your good resolutions and reform all your careless ways. Aren't we, Christina darling?"

"I'm afraid we shan't be much use helping about good resolutions," said Christina doubtfully. "It's not a bit in the twins' line."

"Nonsense!" said Jane loftily. "What you have not done before, you can do again. That's my motto, Christina, and you'd better adopt it. You may depend upon the Terrible Twins, Nancy. I haven't worked out any system yet, but as soon as I have remedied the slight confusion pervading my usually immaculate apartments, I shall consider your case."

"Please do," laughed Nancy. "But remember I'm in dead earnest," she added warningly. "Miss

Marshall was awfully nice to me that last day, and I'm going to pay her up by trying like anything to be less scatter-brained."

"All right," said Jane, diving suddenly into her closet, "only don't, for goodness' sake, be solemncholy about it. The twins won't stand for that! I say, there's a new teacher of something or other this term."

"Yes, and her name's MacPherson," put in Christina, who was in the bedroom arranging her chiffonier drawers.

"Looks rather a jolly lot," called out Jane. "Furthermore, Plain Mary has a new guardian, and she doesn't like him."

"And Mildred Wallace has a little new brother," contributed Christina.

"Lots of excitements, when you consider that we've been gone just one little old week," observed Jane.

"Yes," agreed Nancy, jumping up suddenly. "Good-bye, twins. Maybe my trunk has come now."

"It hasn't," Nancy told herself in the corridor, "because I've kept an eye out for it all the time, and besides, there's no other train until evening. But if I sat around in there any longer with my hands folded, I should be homesick. I'm nearly there now. I've got to rush around and do some-

thing fast! Maybe Grace will let me help her unpack."

But as Nancy knew very well, her fastidious roommate was the last person in the world to let any one help her arrange her belongings—certainly not any one with a tendency to "rush around fast," like Nancy Lee. So poor Nancy disconsolately wandered over to the Junior House, only to find Margaret Lewis, Mildred Wallace, Plain Mary Smith, and the rest all busily getting settled, very glad to see her, and very anxious to have her stay and talk to them while they worked.

"But I can't," objected Nancy half truthfully, "because my trunk might come any minute."

Back in the big dormitory she stopped to welcome the smallest waif-and-stray, Sarah Stuart, who hopped up and down with joyous excitement at sight of her dearest school friend.

"The poor Princess is sick again," Sarah told Nancy eagerly. "Thomas the gardener said so. He said she came to the fence one day and asked for her Real Girls. And when Thomas told her that we'd all gone away, she cried and wouldn't believe him and said they were hiding us from her somewhere. Just to think of that, Nancy, when she gave us a going-away good-bye party her own self. Why, she's as forgetful as our old cook! Cook forgot to feed Annette one day, and

poor Annette mewed and mewed till Cook remembered. I hope the Princess always remembers to feed Prince Charming. When can we go to see the Princess, Nancy?"

"Oh, some day soon," promised Nancy rather crossly, for Sarah's chatter made her feel more fidgety than ever. "I must go now, Sarah."

"Oh, and when you were away, did you think of any new stories?" began little Sarah anxiously. But Nancy had already shut the door.

She climbed the two flights of stairs very slowly. "I'd like to go in and see Lloyd Mallory," she thought, considering what to do next. "But I couldn't stand it to talk to Kittie Westervelt to-day. She's sure to have a lot of new clothes, and she'll want to spread them all out for me to admire. And I don't feel like admiring anything. Oh, dear! If only brother Dick's puppy was here to play with me, wouldn't we just race down this hall! Why, there's a trunk in front of the room Margaret Lewis used to have! Perhaps Lloyd has moved in there this term. No, that's not her trunk. Why, I wonder ——"

A queer little noise coming from behind the door that had been Margaret's until she moved into the Junior House, brought Nancy's reflections to an abrupt pause.

"Sounds like crying." Nancy considered doubt-

fully. "Well, it won't do any great harm to knock." Nancy suited the action to the word.

Inside somebody said something in a choked little voice. It certainly wasn't "Come in"; it might have been "Go away." Nancy considered again, staring thoughtfully at the trunk, which didn't look like any she had seen around the corridors before. It was little and black and shiny, and down the edges were rows of big brass-headed nails.

"I'm sure it's a new girl," she decided swiftly. "Maybe she's little like Sarah, and will want to tag along. If I go in now, I shall sort of have to be friends—that is, if she wants to be. Well, she's certainly crying, poor thing! So here goes."

Again Nancy knocked, and again the choked little voice answered something that was not come in. But Nancy calmly opened the door a little way. "I wondered who's rooming here this term," she began politely. "You did say to come in, didn't you?"

"Sit, please," drawled the choked little voice from the farther end of the room.

It was a queer answer, Nancy thought; but on the strength of it she opened the door wider and stepped inside. Balanced on the edge of a straight-backed chair as though poised for flight, her dark eyes bright with fear, like a cornered animal's, and

her small hands clasping and unclasping nervously round a damp ball of handkerchief in her lap, sat a slender, dark-haired, tear-stained girl, about Nancy's age, dressed all in somber black.

"Oh, you're a new girl, aren't you?" smiled Nancy, holding out her hand. "I'm an old one —that is, I've been here two terms now. But I'm pretty nearly homesick to-day, all the same, so I'm wandering around trying to forget about it. I hope you don't mind my coming in on you like this."

The girl in the chair stared solemnly up at Nancy, twisting her handkerchief harder than ever, and said never a word.

"Shall I sit down here?" asked Nancy, pointing at the little white bed. "We all sit on beds here, but perhaps, if you're not used to it, you'd rather I took a chair." Nancy sank into the one nearest her, while the new girl still stared in silence.

"Were you ever at boarding-school before?" asked Nancy, beginning to feel decidedly awkward, and very much in the way. Still no answer. The new girl's frightened expression was growing positively haunting in its intensity, and Nancy felt her own face stiffening into lines of acute dismay.

"Oh, please say something," she burst out suddenly. "Please do say something quick!

You—you'll really make me feel as frightened as you look, if you go on sitting there so still."

The girl in the chair leaned forward in answer to the appeal in Nancy's voice. "Ah, but I cannot spik ze Anglais," she said, with a woebegone little smile. "I study heem, but when I wish to say" —she made a funny little gesture of confusion— "I have not ze words."

It was Nancy's turn to stare. "You mean," she began at last, "that you're a foreigner?"

"*Française*," nodded the new girl.

"And you've come to Fair Oaks School?"

"Yes, I go to ze school to learn ze ways *Americaines*," assented the girl.

"Why—why, how perfectly jolly!" cried enthusiastic Nancy, as the possibilities of the situation suddenly broke upon her. Not counting Madame Lamark and Mademoiselle, whose English was perfect, Nancy had never known any foreigners except a Greek fruit-vender and a Swedish kitchen maid or two; and the idea of having a French schoolmate fired her romantic little soul.

"You've come straight from France?" she demanded eagerly.

"Oh, yes," nodded the little foreigner.

"How long ago?"

"One month only."

"Isn't that perfectly splendid!" cried Nancy

again. "Why, you don't know much of anything about America, do you? It will be a regular circus, teaching you English. And we can learn French from you. That will be lots more fun than learning it from Mademoiselle. I wonder if they'll have you sit at the French table. Why don't you begin to unpack? Then maybe you won't feel so weepy."

"I do not comp'rend ver' well," suggested the little French girl politely, when excited Nancy came at last to a full stop.

Nancy laughed. "Oh, I never thought—of course you wouldn't understand a muddle of talk like that. The only important thing I said was, why don't you begin to unpack?"

"Begeen to—what you say?"

"Unpack," repeated Nancy. "Don't you understand unpack? Oh, dear, what is the French for it? It means take out your clothes, you know." Then, as the new girl continued to wear her puzzled little frown, "Wait a minute," commanded Nancy, "while I——" And off she flew down the corridor, leaving the French girl staring after her in demure amazement.

"I want my French dictionary," cried Nancy breathlessly to Grace Allen. "There's a new girl, and she can't talk English. Don't you want to come and see her?"

"Your trunk ——" began deliberate Grace, but Nancy was half-way down the hall, the dictionary dangling by its cover in her hand, while most of the books on the shelf with it were cascading noisily to the floor.

"Unpack" did not appear in Nancy's dictionary.

"The words you want never do," grumbled its owner.

But between halting explanations and vivid pantomime enacted above the trunk-lid, Nancy finally made her meaning clear.

"Only it's rather late to begin now," she added hastily, repressing her companion's zeal to carry out instructions at once. "Unpack *ce soir—apres le diner. Maintenant parlez avec moi.* Understand? I guess you never heard such awful French, did you?"

"Ah no, mademoiselle!" assented the French girl with a merry laugh. "It es like my Anglais."

"My name is Nancy Lee," explained Nancy abruptly, because being referred to as mademoiselle made her feel queer. "What's yours?"

"Jeanne Durand."

"How pretty! But you make everything sound pretty, the way you say it. Now talk some French to me, and see if I can understand you."

It took half an hour and more pantomime for Mademoiselle Jeanne to explain to Nancy that her

home was in Amiens, that she had been once to Paris, that she was in mourning for her father, and that her uncle, who lived in New York, was sending her to Fair Oaks. The reason for this rather extraordinary arrangement Nancy pretended to understand, though she did not at all; for, just as Jeanne reached that point in her story, the dressing-bell rang, and an explanatoin of that to Jeanne was immediately in order.

"I'll be back to take you down-stairs," Nancy promised finally, and had to substitute the simpler "Wait for me here" before Jeanne's face lighted with understanding, and she was free to rush back to the Unmixed Study.

"All your little trifling news isn't in it with mine, twins," she began breathlessly. "There's a girl down the hall who can't talk any more English than I can French."

"Then she must be pretty nearly dumb in English," said Jane coolly.

"But why can't she talk English, Nancy?" demanded little Christina, deeply puzzled.

"Wait a minute, Christina," commanded Jane. "Miss I-Forgot, where's your trunk check?"

"Why, I—I gave it to Thomas," said Nancy.

"You dropped it on the floor of this Unmixed Study," corrected Jane severely. "If the gentle Christina hadn't happened to begin to clear up at

that particular corner"—she waved at the place where Nancy had sat that afternoon—"it might be here yet. As it is, your trunk has been awaiting your distinguished attention for fully half an hour."

"Really? Oh, I ought to have looked! Thank you both very much," said Nancy meekly.

"Quite welcome, Miss I-Forgot," went on Jane. "If Christina hadn't found the check, and if I hadn't handed it to Thomas with such a haughty air that he asked no embarrassing questions, you'd be involved in another beautiful episode. Trunk reported lost; wild telephones to station; interviewing of the faultless Thomas; complete forgettery of Nancy Lee once more revealed to the public gaze, instead of being, as at present, the secret of the sacred Triangle. Think what you owe us, Nancy!"

"I'm thinking hard," agreed Nancy promptly, "and in return I'll share the little French girl—we'll have her for a new waif-and-stray. She's the best you ever dreamed of, girls! Come this minute and help me get her down to dinner."

After that there was no chance for Nancy to develop homesickness. Jane's attempts to talk French with Jeanne on the way to dinner were convulsing. Down-stairs the little French girl, with the musical voice, the big, frightened eyes,

and the deep mourning, made a decided sensation. Several Fair Oaks girls spoke excellent French, and could chat with the newcomer as easily as with their other schoolmates. But Jeanne clung timidly to Nancy, whom she seemed to regard as her destined protector from the embarrassingly frank interest of these strange, noisy American girls.

"There, Nancy Lee!" complained Kittie Westervelt, with one of her deepest sighs. "You've gone and made another queer friend. She's interesting, but she won't fit in at all with our crowd. Between her and Lloyd and Sarah Williston, I shan't expect to see anything of you this term."

Nancy laughed. "I don't think you need worry, Kittie. I always seem to have time for more friends and more fun. It's work and responsibility about things that get crowded out with me."

"What sports are you going to take up this term?" asked Kittie anxiously.

"Why, I hadn't thought," returned Nancy doubtfully, just as Billy Bray stepped up to them.

"Will you go out for the Red Crew, Nancy?" asked that popular senior. "I ought to explain that I'm asking several girls to practice with us, and there may be only one vacancy in our boat. But if you cared to try, on the chance ——"

"I should think I do care to try," broke in Nancy eagerly. To be on the Red Crew—"Billy's

Invincibles" they were oftener called—was Nancy's highest ambition for her Fair Oaks career.

"Then watch for the practice notices," said Billy nonchalantly, and departed.

"I was going to tell you,"—Kittie returned to her point,—"that Vera Lawson is planning to take up archery—we're to have that introduced here this term—and riding. She thought our junior crowd might like to know. Every one is riding nowadays, Vera says, and archery is so quaint and picturesque."

"I'd planned to take swimming lessons," said Nancy. "Indeed I think you are required to, if you're on a crew. And I can't bear to give up tennis entirely. And father said I might have riding lessons, if the other girls did. Oh, dear, there's almost too much fun here, isn't there?"

Just then Miss Marshall called the chattering crowd of girls to order, while she introduced the new teacher, Miss MacPherson. She was not exactly a new teacher; she was to be Mistress of Games, Miss Marshall told them; that is, she would have supervision of all the school sports and outdoor activities.

"You'll find her a splendid playfellow, I'm sure," Miss Marshall ended, with a smile for the new mistress. "I've also brought you a new spring-term plaything that I hope you'll enjoy.

But to-morrow or the day after will be time enough to talk about that."

"So we've something to guess about," Nancy wrote that night in the Red Journal, on a page that she had conspicuously lettered "New Leaf." "I love to guess. And I love foreign girls. I'm going to ask father to take me traveling in foreign countries, as soon as ever I'm through school.

"I've had an elegant time to-day, and avoided being homesick, and made a new friend, and learned some French. It was 'Entrez' Jeanne said that sounded like 'Go away.' But I shall have to turn over another New Leaf the very first thing to-morrow.

"N. B. Jane didn't help me not to be careless. She just covered it up. And now that I think it over, I wonder if you ought to call that helping or hindering. Anyway I'm most awfully happy to-night.—N. Lee."

CHAPTER II

THE SPRING-TERM PLAYTHING

THE next day was gray and raw and windy—a very un-spring-like beginning for spring term. Half the school, it seemed, were afflicted with colds or headaches, and the rest grumbled loudly at the weather. Not so the new Mistress of Games.

"In Scotland, where I come from," she told them merrily, "we are never for minding a bit o' mist," and she proceeded to organize a paper-chase among the able-bodied contingent, with the Hares and Hounds named and all sorts of special rules and penalties to add the zest of novelty to the old game. The Hares ran along the lake shore, then up over Sunset Hill, and "took to their burrows" in a sheltered grove under the hill-crest, where the Hounds, who had given their prey ten minutes' start and were seventeen minutes behind at "the burrows," were officially declared beaten.

"I couldn't run another inch," panted Plain Mary Smith, dropping limply down on a big stone, and refusing to bestir herself even over Margaret Lewis's exciting discovery of fuzzy hepatica buds pricking up among the dry leaves.

"Are you fond of hard exercise?" asked Miss MacPherson, with a sympathetic smile for the fat Hound.

"No, I—hate—it," panted Plain Mary sardonically, "but I thought I'd like to grow a little thinner this spring."

"I wanted awfully to ask her what were the most thinning sports," Plain Mary confided to Nancy and Margaret Lewis on the walk home. "But I was afraid she'd laugh. What do you two think?"

"Tennis singles against a champion like Nancy," laughed Margaret, "is about as strenuous as anything I can think of."

"Oh, will you play with me then, Nancy?" begged Plain Mary. "You see," she added, with a violent blush, "I lost two pounds last term, but I gained it all back and some extra in vacation. And then—now I've decided that I'm altogether too stout."

"I'll play tennis with you gladly," Nancy promised, "that is, on days when the crews aren't practicing."

"Oh, are you going out for the Reds too?" asked Margaret. "If so, of course we're bitter rivals, Nancy, for Billy asked me to try."

"Good for you!" said Nancy, trying to speak heartily, but inwardly feeling that her chance of

being an Invincible was as good as lost. Margaret was such a splendid all-around girl. Of course she would row as well as she did everything else, and if there was only one seat vacant in the Invincibles' boat, Margaret would surely be chosen to fill it.

"Mildred Wallace is going to try too," Margaret told her, "and several others, I suppose. Rita Evans had a chance and refused. Imagine that!"

"My chance is pretty slim, I guess, against you; but I'm going to hang on to it," declared Nancy stoutly.

"Oh, how I should love to be slim like your chance!" sighed Plain Mary, with such a comical air of earnestness that both Nancy and Margaret laughed.

"Some are born slim," Margaret paraphrased merrily, "some achieve slimness, and some have slimness thrust upon them. I'm afraid you'll have to achieve it, Mary, by much tennis and no desserts. But why this sudden anxiety about your figure?"

"That's what I want to know," chimed in Nancy gaily. "Are you going to join the Fashion Plates, Mary? Or are you in love, and do you think you ought to pine away a little to prove it?"

But Plain Mary blushed hotly at their accusa-

tions and refused to confess to any ulterior motive.

"Nobody wants to be as big as a barrel," she declared sadly,—a statement which, considering her former indifference to the matter, Margaret and Nancy did not find very convincing.

Little Christina had a frightful cold, and Jane had gallantly discovered symptoms of invalidism in herself, so that she might stay in with her twin for company. But by the time the Hares and Hounds got back, Jane had so far recovered that she had assembled Kittie Westervelt, Lloyd Mallory, Grace Allen, and Jeanne Durand in the Unmixed Study, and was preparing, in the depths of her closet, to give a "Peerless Presentation of the Frabjous Tortoise, a creature as raptly comical and highly enlivening as the Franulated Mufflin is tragic and terrific."

Upon the arrival of Nancy and Margaret Lewis, Jane emerged from the closet, looking quite herself, except that her wispy hair was rather more disheveled than usual, and announced that the Peerless Presentation had been postponed.

"There is a hostile influence abroad," she declared, gesturing impressively at the newcomers. "The sweet frabjous creature will not cavort."

"There was nothing to it anyhow," Jane whispered in an aside to Nancy, who had begged her to

go on. "I just felt like stirring them up, and seeing their eyes pop. But then I decided that dressing up for that bunch was too much bother. I say," she added aloud, "let's all guess on Miss Marshall's spring-term present."

"We've been doing that all day," objected Grace Allen, who resented the summary postponement of the Peerless Presentation.

"Well, then let's—let's institute a reform," went on Jane, nothing daunted by Grace's opposition. "Let's get it ready now, and hop up and suggest it at to-night's Assembly. By the way, you athletes don't know about to-night's Assembly. While you were away, Miss Marshall sent her Mary Ann around to announce it. Guess she thought everybody needed cheering up."

"But what has that to do with instituting a reform?" demanded Margaret in puzzled tones.

Jane sighed. "Must I add two and two for you, creature of no imagination? No wonder the Frabjous Tortoise refused to cavort before you! At to-night's Assembly Miss Marshall will undoubtedly announce to us her spring-term present. Then up gets some busy talker like yourself, and speaks thus: 'In view of your great kindness, dear Miss Marshall, in providing us with such a beautiful innovation, we feel that we too ought to contribute something to the improvement of our beloved

school. We therefore respectfully suggest ——'" Jane paused, and looked at Margaret. "That feather sticker on your hat is done for, my dear."

"I know it," said Margaret sadly; "I caught it on a blackberry bramble while I was picking hepaticas. And this is my only plain hat."

"And your lid is altogether too flossy to match up with a sweater, N. Lee," went on Jane calmly.

"Yes," agreed Nancy. "I wanted a Panama hat this spring but I couldn't have it. They're so expensive just to play around in."

"Vera Lawson's cost seventeen dollars," contributed Kittie Westervelt knowingly.

"That's eighty-five francs, Jeanne," explained Jane, "*pour un chapeau sans les fleurs ou les oiseaux ou les rubans. Terrible, n'est ce pas?*"

"How about the reform, Jane?" interrupted Grace Allen severely.

Jane smiled at her rapturously, through half-closed eyes. "Seventeen, thirty-nine, fifty-seven," she repeated slowly. "Don't you see the reform developing, Grace? Can't you feel it in the air about you? It's a dress reform, of course—a new outing costume for spring term, so that all can be appropriately arrayed—for next to working. Batting hats and batting blouses, total cost fifty-seven cents. That's nearly three francs, Jeanne—*trois francs pour un chapeau et une blouse.* The sewing

class can make the blouses, and the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Society shall be a committee to discover a species of near-Panama that will make Vera Lawson wish she'd kept her seventeen large round dollars for something she really wanted."

"It would be fun to have a sort of picnic uniform," agreed Nancy eagerly.

"But we don't want anything so cheap and homely as fifty-seven cents would buy," declared Kittie with horror-struck decision.

"No," agreed Grace Allen, "and I don't see why we need make a point of the cost at all. Let each girl spend what she pleases."

"But it will be more fun to do it for next to nothing," Jane informed her crushingly, "and also much more reforming. Any old school can have an official batting costume, but only Fair Oaks is clever enough to do it on fifty-seven cents. Are you for it, Lloyd? Christina darling, please explain it all out in French. It would take me the rest of the day to think of all the words. Margaret, you'll have to be the one to speak up in Assembly, because you can talk like a book. My slang would make any reform sound as frivolous as—as Kittie's curls. Now scatter, all of you, and get everybody keen on dress reform. I'll do the Frabjous Tortoise for you the very next rainy day. Cross my frabjous heart!"

So the Assembly before the gym. fire that night talked "batting" hats and "batting" blouses; discussed Mildred Wallace's astounding declaration that there were lovely "near-Panamas" to be had at the ten-cent store; zestfully debated the advantage of "jumpers" and tailored shirt-waists and the purchasing power, in linen, of fifty-seven cents; and sighed with relief that, even if Miss Marshall's "new toy" proved disappointing, there would still be an excitement to end the dull day.

But Miss Marshall wasn't disappointing.

"You can pretty nearly trust her to make good," said Jane Learned. "She's no fossil like poor Miss Cripps, living in a musty past. She understands the word girl, just as it's spelled to-day."

"The new plaything," Miss Marshall began at last from her seat behind the silver coffee urn, "is a bungalow."

Bursts of applause greeted the announcement. There was not a Fair Oaks girl that year who didn't "just adore" bungalows, though she might be a little hazy about the exact meaning of the term. If Miss Marshall had said "one-story cottage," half the glamour would have been brushed away from the new toy.

"Oh, where is it?"

"Can't we see it right off?"

"How are we to play with it?"

"Is it big enough to hold us all?"

Miss Marshall laughingly put up her hands, as though to fend off the flood of eager questions.

"It's a tiny house in the woods," she went on, when the girls would let her, "on the shores of a little lake called Bubble Pond. It's half an hour by train from here, with a two-mile walk or drive after that. The house is new—plain and unpretentious but pretty, I think; and it needs everything from a name and a coat of paint of exactly the right color, to furnishings, curtains, kitchen utensils, and a garden fitted into the woods that grow up to its very doors.

"We will go out on a tour of inspection soon—the house will hold us all for a day, I think, provided we are friendly enough not to mind being a little crowded. Meanwhile here are pictures, plans, and a statement of the amount I care to invest in adding the finishing touches to our bungalow. I shall depend upon you all to help me make it the prettiest, most convenient little house-in-the-woods that was ever fitted up for so modest a sum of money. Now that's how you are to play with my house—our house. Shall you enjoy it, do you think? Oh, yes, and when it is finished, you may form groups and take turns giving house-parties out there, with the various teachers as guests."

There was more applause and a tumult of new questions.

"When can we begin?"

"How soon must we finish?"

"Are we to choose whatever we all vote for?"

"Wouldn't it be better to divide up into special committees in charge of the different parts of the work?"

"May we ask the teachers to help us?"

"Where can we find out about prices?"

"How can we do anything about your house without knowing your ideas for furnishing it?"

Again Miss Marshall put out her hand for silence.

"Girls," she told them laughingly, "nobody can accuse you of being impractical young dreamers. You are picking out all the complexities and anticipating all the difficulties in my scheme—and it's full of both, I'll admit. But —— Well, what is it, Miss Wallace?" she demanded of sandy-haired Mildred, who was sitting on the floor at her feet, and who was making it evident by the play of her mobile little face that she wanted desperately to say something.

"Oh, Miss Marshall," began Mildred, overcome with embarrassment at being publicly addressed, "I was just thinking that worth-while playthings—the kind that you'd be sure to give us—generally

have a good deal of hard work in them too. I was thinking that we should learn a lot out of your bungalow—more than they've learned here in other spring terms."

Everybody laughed at Mildred's comical, downright way of announcing her discovery.

"You've found me out, Miss Wallace," Miss Marshall told her. "I had meant to explain a little later that the bungalow course was really a series of lessons in assorted domestic sciences—that I hoped you would learn something about house-furnishing, marketing, cooking, and gardening, besides a little about our native wild flowers and our forest trees, and that you would find the lessons more profitable, as well as pleasanter, than such lessons generally are. As Miss Wallace has said, all playthings worth having involve work as well as fun; so there's really no use in trying to hide, even for a little while at first, the fact that owning a bungalow is like owning anything else in this world. It's a bother! Now, with your eyes open, do you vote to be bothered with a bungalow?"

The vote was unanimous and noisily enthusiastic. When the confusion had subsided a little, Margaret Lewis, rising in her place by the fire, made a graceful little speech about Jane's reform. This time it was only the teachers who were surprised, for Jane and her friends had spread the

news of the plan broadcast among the girls, finding them all in favor of it except Vera Lawson, Kittie, and the other Fashion Plates, who objected that they had clothes enough for all occasions and no use at all for a cheap and ugly uniform.

Miss Marshall was as delighted with the idea as Jane had been when Margaret's draggled feather had opportunely put it into her head.

"The very thing to wear on our bungalow parties!" she exclaimed. "Making the shirts will give the sewing classes a part in the bungalow course, and if the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Club"—Miss Marshall twinkled merrily at Jane as she pronounced the absurd name—"if the Stick-by Your-Own-Hat Club will act as committee on the subject of millinery, and report as soon as practicable, I—we all shall be much in their debt." Miss Marshall looked around the circle of intent, happy faces. "I've never cared much about the regular sort of school uniform," she told them, "but a ——"

"Batting uniform," supplied Jane helpfully before she thought, and was instantly overcome by confusion.

"We might say outing costume," suggested Miss Marshall, with a smile for poor blushing Jane. "An official outing costume that costs fifty-seven cents, and is sensible and becoming into the

bargain,—especially since the suggestion comes straight from you girls,—will please me more than I can say. It will typify exactly the sort of school spirit that I want to cultivate here at Fair Oaks—the spirit of working together for the happiness and best interests of all."

There was a pause, broken abruptly by Mildred Wallace. "I've been thinking," she announced in her funny, quick way, "that jumpers will go on much quicker than shirt-waists—at the bungalow, you know, when we're hurrying to dress and to cook breakfast for our faculty guests."

"Then I move for jumpers," cried Jane, and everybody laughed and cried "Jumpers for us," "Jumpers forever," as the Assembly broke up in a mood of irresponsible gaiety.

On the way back to the dormitory Nancy found herself beside Vera Lawson.

"Isn't it all just splendid!" sparkled Nancy, smiling up into Vera's lovely, impassive face. "Don't you ever get excited and—oh, just ready to boil over, Vera?"

Vera smiled placidly back at Nancy. "Not over a silly little summer cottage, certainly," she said. "We all have summer places of our own, I suppose. If Miss Marshall wants hers attractively furnished, why doesn't she put it into the hands of some New York decorator, as any of our families

would do? As for the outing costume, I positively refuse to be made a fright of." And with another smile and a shrug, Vera turned away, leaving Nancy sorely puzzled. The Lees had a summer place up on the Maine Coast. Nancy didn't know who had chosen the furnishings, and she couldn't see, anyway, what that had to do with Miss Marshall's lovely plan. If Vera didn't think it was fun to fix up a bungalow, what was her idea of fun? Nancy was thinking so hard that she came round a corner and bumped bang into Plain Mary Smith, who had a perfect passion for running into people.

"Oh, I'm sorry," gasped Mary contritely. "I was thinking about something, and I didn't see you. I suppose you were thinking too. I'm going to make my batting jumper just as tight as I can squeeze into it."

"Oh, I wouldn't, Mary," advised Nancy. "If it's too small, it will only make you look stouter than usual."

"Will it?" sighed Mary. "I never thought of that. I just thought having it a tight fit would be an added incentive to grow thin."

Nancy laughed. "Have you lost weight to-day?"

"A quarter of a pound," announced Mary solemnly, "unless the scales in the gym. are different from those at home."

"Please tell me why you want so much to grow thin," begged Nancy.

"Nobody wants to look like a barrel," muttered Plain Mary, and hurried off to her room.

Nancy stared after her frowningly. "There's a mystery about Plain Mary," she reflected. "I must get Jane started on it. She's such a wonder at finding things out."

CHAPTER III

THE ORDER OF WOODLAND WANDERERS

SPRING just wouldn't come at Fair Oaks—unless you could call April showers, so cold and bleak that they turned into snow flurries every once in a while, spring-like. Even Miss MacPherson's Scotch heart quailed before such a persistent and frigid downpour, and recreation hours were spent in the gym. dancing or playing basket-ball, "exactly as we did all last term," wailed Kittie Westervelt gloomily. "And I thought I should really enjoy archery, for all I'm not athletic."

The only consolation—and that was cold comfort for Kittie—was that the rainy afternoons were ideal for sewing on the Official Outing Costume. Miss Marshall allowed the sewing classes to hold special sessions, extra long and quite informal, and by the end of that horrid wet week almost every Fair Oaks girl was the proud possessor of a white linen jumper, with tie and pipings of her favorite color. Some of the defter seamstresses had even finished two, besides lending a helping hand to the smallest boarders, who had mastered only "plain sewing," but who would have been broken-hearted

to be excluded from the pleasant bustle that centered around the Fair Oaks "batting costume."

Meanwhile the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Club had braved the elements and followed Mildred's lead to the ten-cent store, where they had discovered a most wonderful species of "near-Panama," soft and floppy but not slouchy, and universally becoming. Madame Lamark had outdone herself in designing natty bows for those who wanted bows, and suggesting original color-schemes for bands, when bands were preferred. Even Vera, Kittie, and the Fashion Plates had to admit, sulkily or sheepishly according to their dispositions, that the fifty-seven-cent outing costume was, to quote Jane Learned, a perfectly howling success.

One afternoon at the end of the rainy week, Nancy Lee appeared at the door of the Unmixed Study, her usually merry face overspread with a cloud of black despair.

"Oh, Christina!" she called. "See what I've done now!"

"She can't—not at present, anyhow," returned Jane's shrill voice from the bedroom beyond the study. "She's attending Miss Courtney's select soirée for stupids, getting extra coaching on binomial theorem."

"Poor little thing!" sympathized Nancy.

"Well, I did my best for her, I'm sure," bristled Jane, coming out into the study. "I explained and explained. How I shall ever pull Christina through the Higher Mathematics I really don't see."

"It's a great responsibility being a twin, isn't it?" said Nancy solemnly.

"It is," agreed Jane, "at least for the big twin. And I suppose Christina worries about my Order-and-Neatness and Deportment marks as much as I do about her Math."

"Maybe if you were more alike——" began Nancy.

"Great hat, Nancy Lee!" broke in Jane impatiently. "Do you think I could love a big, messy, awkward thing like me as I do Christina? And if I weren't big and masterly and used to looking out for two, how would Christina ever manage? No, thank you, N. Lee; the twins are very well satisfied as they are, if you please. Now what did you want Christina to see? Mayn't I see it, or isn't it in my line?"

Nancy laughed. "It's exactly in your line, Jane. That is, it's exactly the kind of thing you do, but I thought Christina could help me to fix it, perhaps. At least—no, I'm sure there's no way of fixing it. It's just ruined, and that's all you can say about it!" Nancy's voice grew tragic, as she spread out the jumper she was carrying over

her arm to display a big, three-cornered cut on the very top of the left sleeve. "It's ruined!" repeated Nancy forlornly. "I shall have to make another. I don't mind the extra work, but I do hate to have everybody know that I was so careless."

Jane scrutinized the sleeve near-sightedly. "How'd you do it?" she demanded.

"Oh, I was snipping off the rough edges around the armhole," explained Nancy, "and somehow my scissors slipped. They were Grace's scissors, and awfully sharp, because she won't ever use them to cut paper with, or picture-wire. And in an instant they'd done that."

Jane smiled wickedly. "Then it's all Grace's fault, being so tight with her sharp scissors. Make her mend it for you. She's a truly beautiful mender. And if anybody notices it, you can quote Miss Marshall to the effect that a tear neatly mended is a work of art."

"But that's not a tear," wailed Nancy. "You don't get tears up there. Besides, I most certainly couldn't ask Grace to mend it, and even if I did, it would show, and—oh, it's ruined, that's all."

"Well, anyhow, you don't have to make a whole new jumper," announced Jane, with the air of having at last made a valuable discovery. "All you need is one new sleeve."

"But one sleeve takes cloth," objected Nancy,

still disconsolate, "and I'll have to buy it at the school store, because all they had down-town was sent up here; and Miss Dutton will be sure to ask why I need more, when she signs my store slip; and then she'll be sure to tell Miss Marshall, because they both knew about my packing all my skirts."

Jane nodded. "Nice new joke on our I-Forgot Girl. Next time look before you cut, N. Lee. This time"—Jane paused and squinted hard at the zigzag cut—"you'll—why, you'll just have to make a feature of it, of course!" she ended triumphantly.

"But I can't ask Grace ——" repeated Nancy.

Jane waved away the objection. "You needn't. Patch it together yourself. Then add the feature."

"Oh, Jane, please don't talk riddles," begged puzzled Nancy.

"Go and get some of the blue linen you used for trimming," commanded Jane. "You had some little pieces left, didn't you? Oh, and bring a needle, because I lost ours last night, and Christina hasn't had time to hunt it up."

Nancy darted off after the scraps of blue linen that matched her tie and the narrow line of color that edged her sailor collar and deep cuffs. When she got back, Jane was at her desk, covering a sheet of paper with queer-looking designs.

"I'm making a pattern of a feature to cover the

cut," she explained, "but I can't think of a careless animal. Can you, Nancy? A careless animal would be the very thing for your sleeve."

Nancy grinned. "Puppies are fearfully careless," she suggested. "Brother Dick's new collie pup is about the most careless animal you'd want around."

"Yes," agreed Jane, holding her pencil poised above the paper, "but I can't draw well enough to make a careless puppy look different from any staid old dog. Can you?"

Nancy shook her head, considering. "And I guess no grown-up animals are careless," she announced at last. "They have to look out for themselves, just as grown-up girls do. Oh, dear!"

"Never mind," said Jane consolingly. "We'll think of an appropriate symbol for you in a minute. I know! We'll put on letters, and make the others guess. And perhaps, as you're so set on not being an I. F. G., we'd better not use that combination. We might have a triangle, only most people know about the Triangle. We might ——"

"Something about outdoor sports would be nice for an outing costume," suggested Nancy.

"Why not start a sort of outdoor club?" Jane took her up. "The Gamboling Girls. Only g is a very hard letter to make. The Happy Hikers. The Order of Woodland Wanderers."

"Oh, I like that!" cried Nancy.

"All right. W. W. will cover up that jagged cut beautifully. You make the pattern for 'em, Nancy, while I hunt up some red to go on my sleeve, and some pink for Christina. I want a feature too, and of course she will."

In the midst of the cutting Christina came in, her cheeks flushed with her frantic efforts to comprehend the binomial theorem before it was too late.

"Never mind, Christina darling," Jane consoled her beloved twin. "Forget that the hateful thing exists to baffle you. We've started the Order of Woodland Wanderers while you were gone, and the Triangle belongs, but it's a secret from everybody else. So hunt up our needle, or borrow one from Nancy, because we're in a hurry, and sew these beautiful pink letters, that I cut for you myself and got one crooked, on to the left sleeve of your batting blouse. While you work, consider whether or not we shall admit the waifs-and-strays to the new Order."

"It would be jolly to have Margaret Lewis," said Christina, accepting the situation with the placid philosophy that long experience of Jane's vagaries had made easy to her. "But little Sarah would be a bother, if you mean that we're going to take long walks."

"Oh, it hasn't anything particular to do with

long walks," Jane explained impatiently. "Nancy cut a hole in her sleeve, and we started the W. W.'s because she needed a feature to cover the place. She came over to get you to help her fix it up. Please note, Miss I-Forgot, that, for the second time this term, the twins have saved you from public disgrace,—though getting people out of fixes isn't at all like us. Which again proves my motto: What you have never done before you can do again. Now: shall we have young Sarah in our Order, or shan't we?"

"It isn't always so nice to have her, but it does make her most dreadfully happy," said Nancy, remembering, with a sudden stab of remorse, that she had hardly seen little Sarah since that first homesick afternoon when she had been cross to her. "I'll look out for her," she added, "and try not to let her bother the rest."

"We'll look out for her too, because she's our waif-and-stray," promised earnest little Christina. "Now what about the newest waif-and-stray from France? I don't know as she'd care particularly about being asked. She seems to be getting very intimate with Vera Lawson and her crowd."

"They speak French so much better than we do," put in Nancy apologetically. "Jeanne must find it tiresome to try to understand us."

"She seemed to like us pretty well that first

night," Jane reminded them. "The wonder to me is that the great Vera has taken her up. Jeanne hasn't any flossy clothes ——"

"Of course not, Jane, when she is in mourning," Christina reminded her twin, in shocked tones.

"Well, it's very shabby mourning," Jane insisted, "not at all the kind that the Vera-ites would be seen in. Furthermore, I have an idea that she gets something knocked off her tuition for helping Mademoiselle with the French conversation. She has a decided air of doing her duty when she keeps the talk going at her end of the French table."

"Well, she's a dear, anyway," Nancy declared, "and I'm glad that Vera Lawson has the sense to see it. But all the same I move we ask her to join the Woodland Wanderers. Think how lonely we'd feel if we were any of us off by ourselves at a French school, and how glad we'd be to be asked to join in the fun."

"Rather!" said Jane, shivering at the awful prospect. "All right, we'll ask her. She can turn us down if she wants to. But let's spread the excitement out by not telling even Margaret and Sarah and Jeanne about the Order until after we've worn our features once or twice, and got people busy guessing the letters."

"Oh, yes, let's do it that way!" Nancy, having finished sewing on her "feature," had slipped her

jumper over her serge dress, and now stood before Christina's gold-rimmed mirror, surveying the result with complete satisfaction. "I do just love secrets and mysteries!"

"When you're in them," amended Jane, who was also trying on her jumper. "I really ought to have put my letters up on that shoulder seam. It's most frightfully crooked."

"Speaking of mysteries," said Nancy, "there's one that we're not in. At least I'm not. Do either of you happen to know why Plain Mary Smith is so anxious to grow thin?"

"Is she?" demanded Jane, pulling at the offending shoulder seam.

"I should think she might very easily be," said Christina, standing on tiptoe to pull too.

"But she never used to care a bit how she looked," persisted Nancy.

"She's growing older and wiser," suggested Jane.

"She's not much older and wiser than she was the last week of last term, when she ate half a fruit-cake and pounds of candy out of Angelica Ransom's birthday box. Now she won't so much as touch candy or desserts or cake."

"Really?" Jane was getting interested. "That's certainly going some for a lady with Plain Mary's sweet tooth. Won't she tell why she wants to grow thin?"

"I DO JUST LOVE SECRETS AND MYSTERIES"

Nancy shook her head. "Just says she hates to look like a barrel."

"And the next question," murmured Jane, "is: why has she so suddenly acquired a distaste for looking like a barrel? We'll investigate the mystery of Mary at once."

As Nancy opened her own door, she suddenly remembered that W. W. was a secret, and tucked away the "feature" carefully out of sight in the folds of her jumper, doing it with a guilty feeling because she knew that Grace would resent being left out of the new Order.

For the present Grace was in a very amiable mood. "I've been down to order a riding skirt," she explained to Nancy. "Miss Dutton chaperoned us, and we had lots of fun. Why didn't you come too, Nancy?"

"I'm not going to have a skirt made," Nancy told her. "Mother promised to send me a ready-made linen one. She said that would be plenty good enough until I was sure of riding regularly."

"I shall ride at home this summer, if I like it as well as I expect to," said Grace. "Mildred Wallace isn't going to have riding lessons. She got her letter about it to-day. Her mother thinks they can't afford any extras just now, because some of the younger children have been sick, and there's a new baby. It must be dreadful to be poor

and have lots of little brothers and sisters to look out for."

Nancy's face clouded. She had had a little sister once. "I'd be willing to give up quite a lot if our family was bigger," she said. "I should just hate to be an only child."

"Thank you," said Grace stiffly.

"Oh, I forgot!" Nancy apologized contritely. "I mean, I didn't mean anything against your being an only child, Grace. I only meant that I do just love big families. Mildred has a picture of hers, and they're just like a flight of steps, with Mildred at the top."

"And Mildred wears shabby hats and can't have riding lessons."

"Yes, but ——" Nancy paused, afraid of getting into hot water again. "I'm sorry she can't be in the riding class," she went on at last. "It won't be half as much fun without her."

Grace looked quizzically at her roommate, opened her mouth to speak, then changed her mind abruptly and sat down at her desk.

"How does she manage to make her back hair and her shoulders say, 'Keep away!' just as plain as talking?" wondered poor Nancy, going to put away her re-decorated jumper.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY OF MARY

VERA LAWSON sat at her shining mahogany desk in her pretty, littered study, writing a letter home. It seemed to be a hard letter to write. After every sentence or two Vera paused, and leaning her head on her hand sat staring blankly at the wall above her desk, her forehead puckered into a troubled frown and the corners of her mouth drawn down into unbecoming curves of discontent and annoyance.

At last the letter was finished, and Vera read it through hastily.

"Dear mother," it ran, "I don't see how I can possibly manage on a smaller allowance. Do you realize that this is my last term here, and that my friends will expect me to do more than usual, instead of less?

"Aunt Frances has written asking me for the regular two weeks' visit—in June! If she thinks I am going to bury myself at the Island before half the hotels are opened or the cottage season has well begun, with nothing to do but read aloud to her, and drive with her after her fat, slow horses, and listen to all her good advice,—why,

I'm not going to do anything of the sort, if I can possibly help it. Several of the girls have hinted at house-parties and yachting trips, and I shall hold off Aunt Frances until I am sure of the other invitations. They all, no doubt, think it strange that I say nothing of the usual week-end parties at Hill Crest.

"There's an adorable French girl here this term. Her family own a chateau in Brittany, and apparently belong to the old noblesse. She is charming —speaks with a wonderful accent. We are very intimate already, and I'm hoping that she will ask me over to spend the summer. It would mean everything to me, for Jeanne says that American girls are all the rage over there, and with my looks and clothes and the 'dot' Aunt Frances would certainly give me, to get me off her hands—oh, it sounds terribly mean and pushing, doesn't it? But when one is thrown on one's own resources as I am, she has to push, or she will be pushed to the wall.

"I hope you are not getting too tired. It must be frightful struggling along with only one servant in that big house. I am glad Rob seems better.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"VERA.

"P. S. How is father?"

With an impatient sigh, Vera folded, sealed, and addressed her letter, and put it out on the upper hall table for a maid to mail. Then, slipping on a becoming gray coat with trimmings of silky black

fur, she ran across the campus to the dormitory, and climbed the stairs to Jeanne Durand's room. Nobody answered her twice repeated knock.

With a noiseless tread Vera crept down the hall, listening outside one door after another, until she came to the twins' study. There was small need of caution there. The sounds of mirth and revelry that drifted over the open transom would effectually drown out almost any commotion outside. For several moments Vera, furtive eyes on the door for fear of some sudden exodus, listened intently. Then Jeanne's voice, raised in amused protest, rewarded her patient waiting.

"Ah, but you spik so quick!" cried the little French girl. "It is not I who rush my words. It ez you—you *rapides Americaines.*"

Her face white with anger, Vera started down the stairs. The Learned twins, with their cool disregard of conventions, their unquenchable spirits and inexhaustible energy, had already foiled her plans more than once, and indeed almost broken short her reign at Fair Oaks. Now, out of pure spite no doubt, they were winning Jeanne away from her. Vera bit her pretty lips hard, and determined that this time the twins should lose. What did they want of an invitation to a chateau in Brittany—those crude, inexperienced chits, with bad manners and worse clothes? Considering

ways and means, Vera decided to cultivate Nancy Lee, who had introduced Jeanne to the twins and might somehow or other be induced to keep her away from them in the future. Nancy was a safe enough friend for Jeanne. She did not exercise the curious influence over people that the twins did. Between herself and Nancy, Vera felt quite sure which would get the invitation to the chateau in Brittany ; it would not be Nancy.

If Vera had stopped to hear more of the conversation going on in the Unmixed Study, her scorn for the twins would have been deeper than ever.

"It seemed perfectly possible to me," Jane was announcing in loud, defensive tones to an audience shouting with laughter. "But of course when you enter into details——" Jane waved a deprecating hand to suggest that her ideas were too large to make the consideration of mere details possible. "Anyhow, the tailor absolutely refuses to attempt it," she ended sadly.

"I should think he might, Jane," laughed Margaret Lewis. "If the skirt-band fitted Christina, and the length was right for you—or the other way round—or half-way between—I really don't wonder that the tailor refused to make a riding-skirt that was fitted to a creature half-way between you and Christina." Margaret went off again into a gale of laughter.

"Well, we couldn't afford to have two skirts made," explained little Christina with dignity, when she could be heard, "and ready-mades are always too short for Jane, and of course I wouldn't have one unless she did."

"So we're not riding this spring," ended Jane, in absurd imitation of the tone in which Kittie Westervelt was wont to announce what was or was not "done" in polite society.

There were exclamations of dismay from Nancy and Plain Mary, who completed the group in the study.

"I'm rather glad you're not," said Margaret Lewis quickly. "That's not sour grapes either; I hope I'm not small enough to begrudge other people their good times, even when I'm not going to be in them. But this riding class is actually dividing the school into two classes: the envied and the envious. I didn't realize until last night"—Margaret lowered her voice and looked soberly around the circle, as if to demand real understanding and sympathy—"I didn't realize, until Mildred Wallace couldn't keep back the tears when she spoke about it, and Carlene Marbury said it was spoiling everything and dividing us up into 'the many who can have things and the few who can't,' how strong the feeling is about these expensive riding lessons. Of course

if Fair Oaks were a fashionable school with dozens of extras, one more wouldn't be noticed. But as it is,—well, I'm rather glad that Jane and Christina are going to join the 'few who can't.' Because when Jane and Christina can't do one thing, they always find another that's just as much fun."

"If not more so," put in Nancy, trying to speak lightly, but looking a good deal troubled. There was an awkward silence.

"Margaret," demanded Nancy at last, "do you mean that you think none of us ought to take the lessons?"

Thus sharply challenged, Margaret hesitated a minute. "Why—I hadn't thought of it that way, Nancy," she said gently. "It's for each girl to say, of course."

"Is that why you didn't plan to ride in the first place?" demanded Nancy again.

"No," explained Margaret, flushing a little under Nancy's determined catechism. "I—I—don't often speak of it, because I hate to have people think of it when they see me, but I'm just the least little bit lame. I can outwalk most girls, and even run enough to play tennis and paper-chase and all that; but there are a few things I can't do. For instance, I can't sit quite straight on a horse, so I prefer not to ride."

"I never knew that you were lame, Margaret,"

cried Nancy repentantly, "and I'm sorry I made you tell us."

"We shall never think of it again," promised Jane.

"Never," echoed Christina and Plain Mary, while Jeanne smiled her bewildered little smile into Margaret's flushed face.

"And I think I should feel more comfortable not to take the lessons," declared Nancy. "Father didn't much approve of it, when I first asked him. He said he thought we had sports enough here already, and I believe he was right. And that was before he knew about the bungalow," added Nancy, with an air of relief at remembering that one very pleasant thing was still left her.

Plain Mary sighed deeply. "Riding won't be much fun without you four," she said, "but it's terribly thinning, so I guess I'd better stick to it. Besides, I'm not popular enough to have it make much difference whether I do or don't."

"You're popular enough so that this mad desire you show to be an airy fairy Mary is the talk of the school," Jane told her severely.

"Nonsense!" muttered Plain Mary, her round cheeks flushing. "Nobody wants to look like ——"

"A barrel," supplied Jane easily. "But why not? That's the question. Why do you gorge

merrily on fruit cake and chocolates one week, and the next refuse even the harmless school puddings? There's a mystery about you, Mary Smith, and I intend to devote my best detective abilities to solving it."

"Oh, don't, Jane!" begged Plain Mary piteously, but Jane was inexorable.

"You mustn't have secrets from the twins," she ordered. "It's against all rules."

"I must go home now, Mary," laughed Margaret Lewis, "and you'd better come too. That will put a stop to Jane's detecting, for the time being at least. And Nancy," added Margaret shyly, "please do just as you like about the riding lessons. Perhaps I'm silly to feel as I do about Mildred and the rest."

"You're a dear to feel as you do, and I'm acting just as I want to in giving up the lessons," Nancy declared earnestly.

Still aglow with her enthusiasm, she rushed across the hall and announced her decision to Grace. The minute she had spoken, Nancy realized that she had "put her foot in it" again. Grace's face grew white and hard as she listened to Nancy's eager announcement and halting, embarrassed explanations, ending with, "I do hope you won't mind very much, Grace."

"You don't care in the least whether I mind,"

Grace retorted angrily. "You never care about me. You care about the twins and Margaret and Lloyd Mallory and Mildred and Sarah Williston and that queer French girl. And they care about you. But nobody cares about me—nobody!"

The pathetic break in Grace's voice touched Nancy, in spite of her distaste for Grace's emotional heroics.

"Indeed I do care about you and about doing things with you," she said earnestly. "But this time—well, I just didn't think, Grace, about anythink except what Margaret was saying. You know just how scatter-brained I am! You—you wouldn't care to join the walking party, as Jane called us?"

"No," said Grace shortly, "I shouldn't. Riding is a very popular sport everywhere this year and I want to learn. Besides, my habit is ordered, and I don't intend to waste it. But—but thank you for including me," she ended with unwonted appreciation.

"Oh, that's nothing," averred Nancy, thinking guiltily of the Woodland Wanderers. When Grace heard about that, there would be more hurt feelings. She laughed nervously. "We're talking as if two little rides a week would separate us completely. We're making a big fuss about a very small matter."

"It's not a small thing to me," Grace persisted solemnly. "At least, it's just typical of all the things that are forever happening to me. I can't seem to make real friends, no matter how hard I try. What can I do to make people really like me, Nancy, as they do you and the twins?"

"Well, you see, you didn't care especially about making friends at first," Nancy reminded her. "You acted sort of offish, and now you've got to let the girls see that you've changed your ideas."

"Yes, but how?" persisted Grace. Nancy considered, frowning. It was a hard question, especially when there were a great many things you couldn't say to so sensitive a person as Grace Allen. Suddenly she had an inspiration. "Isn't there a proverb or something that says the way to make friends is to be one? Seems to me that would work, Grace."

There was a thump on the door, and hot upon it Jane Learned appeared.

"I say, Nancy, come and see me extract Plain Mary's deepest secret. I've just thought how. Hurry, or we won't have time before the dressing-gong."

"All right," agreed Nancy, grateful for the interruption. "Won't you come too, Grace? It's just a silly joke about Mary's wanting to grow thin all of a sudden."

"No, thank you," said Grace, adding hastily, "I have things to do before dinner, so you'll have to tell me about it when you get back."

"I will," promised Nancy, rushing after Jane, who was already half-way down the stairs, muttering, "Laugh at my detective ability, did they? Think they could escape me by running away, did they, the simple ones?" as she ran.

"How are you going to do it, Jane?" demanded Nancy eagerly.

Jane refused to divulge her plan. "Wait and see," she ordered.

Plain Mary was alone in her "single." At sight of Jane she jumped up and blushing her awkward, brick-red blush begged Jane to "Please go away and not tease."

"Oh, but you tease so beautifully, Mary," Jane explained pleasantly. "I say, Mary Smith, what will you do for me if I won't call you Fatty?"

"You wouldn't be so mean," declared Plain Mary hotly.

"Sure I would," Jane assured her calmly. "I'm always giving nicknames. And they always stick. There was a girl named Henrietta at our first boarding-school that I called Fuzzy,—because of her hair, you know. Well, she simply couldn't shake that name. She was married a while ago, and in the midst of the ceremony her

young man forgot and called her Fuzzy! Fatty would sound grand in a marriage ceremony, wouldn't it?"

Mary blushed redder than ever. "Make her stop, Nancy."

"She can't stop me," said Jane placidly, "even if she wants to, which she probably doesn't. I've set my heart on calling you Fatty and seeing the rest of Fair Oaks follow suit,—unless of course you would prefer ——" Jane's voice trailed sweetly off into vacancy.

Plain Mary looked appealingly from Jane to Nancy, who wore a rather sympathetic expression but said nothing, and then back to Jane.

"What do you want me to do for not calling me F—that name?" she demanded wearily.

"Only a mere trifle. Tell me what is your real reason for not wanting to be a Fatty, and I'll never speak the hateful name again."

Plain Mary glared angrily. "It's not your business ——" she burst out.

"Certainly not, my dear Fatty," agreed Jane sweetly, "except that I take a friendly interest in any mystery that affects a good friend of mine."

For a moment longer Plain Mary glared, then she capitulated. "All right," she agreed sullenly.

"It's got to be honest and true, 'cross your heart,' of course," put in Jane quickly.

"Of course," agreed her victim. "Well, then, you see—I've got a new guardian ——"

"We know that," Jane told her. "And you don't like him."

"I never said so!" cried Plain Mary indignantly. "I only said it was a lot easier having the old one that never took an interest or bothered me about things."

"Things like being fat," put in Jane smilingly.

"How you do guess!" wailed Plain Mary helplessly. "Well, I've got a new guardian, and he prefers slim girls like Nancy—not bean poles like you, Jane Learned. And so I'm trying to grow thin. Now that's all I promised to tell you, and it's all I will tell you," ended Plain Mary in a burst of righteous indignation.

"That's right, Mary, stick up for yourself," said Nancy admiringly. "Come on now, Jane, or we shall be late for dinner. Besides, you've bothered her enough for one day."

"As if you didn't want to find out about it a lot more than I did!" cried Jane reproachfully.

"Yes, I guess I did," acknowledged Nancy. "Why in the world wouldn't you tell us when we first asked you, Mary?"

"Oh—because ——" stammered Mary. "Because it wouldn't interest you. What do you care about my guardian?"

"Is he awfully old and strict?" asked Nancy, to whom the whole subject of guardians was wrapped in fascinating mystery.

"Not so terribly old," said Mary, "and not strict exactly, but—oh, sort of particular."

"Well, I'd never give up cake and candy, and bother with strenuous exercises, just to please a fussy old guardian," said Jane, departing.

"Yes, you would," Plain Mary informed her positively. But Jane did not hear, for Plain Mary had carefully waited until the door was shut before delivering her judgment.

CHAPTER V

A HOUSE-WARMING AT "SELDOM INN"

It was a glorious April morning. The Fair Oaks dining-room was bright with spring sunshine and buzzing with talk and laughter. For wasn't this "the very first warm and sunny day" of the term, and hadn't Miss Marshall promised them a "bungalow-warming" whenever that day came?

Thomas the gardener had departed for Bubble Lake at daybreak to warm and air the bungalow, and put it, as far as was possible, considering its unfurnished state, in readiness for the invasion of its numerous proprietors. He had carried with him two huge hampers of luncheon, and all through the breakfast hour Mary Ann crossed and recrossed the dining-room on her way between the kitchen and the front hall, her head in the air, her figure bristling with importance and her arms full of baskets and boxes to add to the pile of "bungalow luggage" that was heaped on the hall table. Mary Ann was going too, of course; Fair Oaks could not conduct any important function such as a bungalow-warming without its Mary Ann.

To a woman, Fair Oaks was proudly arrayed in

its official outing costume. Partly because of the rapidity with which jumpers may be donned, no one had been even one minute late for breakfast: a fact which Miss Marshall declared she considered ample indorsement of the chosen costume.

Three jumpers had a particular interest for all beholders; Nancy and the Learned twins wore their "features,"—likewise an air of modest unconcern which put an edge to the general curiosity. If the Triangle acted like that, it would pay the public to investigate; and investigation was begun forthwith.

"Think," commanded Jane briefly to all inquirers. "Exercise your minds a little, just for a change. Real fun involves work, to quote our wise Principal; therefore work. I positively refuse for the present to confirm or deny your idle guesses."

So likewise did Nancy and Christina, though Christina opened her mouth to say, "You're warm," to the girl who suggested "Weary Wanderers" and Nancy hugged little Sarah when she said, "I think it has something to do with the woods, 'cause we're going to the woods to-day."

"Willing Workers" was speedily adopted as the guess most pertinent to the occasion, if not the most probable; and the biggest baskets and the bulkiest bundles were summarily thrust upon the W. W.'s, who received them so cheerfully that the

teasing promptly ceased. After all, the W. W.'s could be discussed any day, but there was only one Fair Oaks bungalow-warming, and it deserved undivided attention.

At Bubble Lake station a huge wagon was waiting for the baskets and boxes and a few of the very smallest girls. The rest were to walk. Even Vera Lawson and the Fashion Plates strolled faster than usual, while enthusiastic spirits like Nancy and Margaret fairly raced down the winding country road, and in their haste narrowly missed the wood-path, that led, by a short-cut, straight to the back door of the bungalow.

It was a fascinating path.

"Think what it will be when the ferns unroll!" cried Nancy breathlessly, pointing to a great bed of brown, tight-coiled fronds.

"It's a shame to hurry so," sighed Margaret.

"I'm coming back as soon as I've seen the bungalow," announced Lloyd Mallory. "I never was in a wood like this before. Oh, Nancy, Margaret, look!" Lloyd was on her knees beside the path, pointing ecstatically at a cluster of pink, waxy blossoms just showing above a covering of dry leaves.

Margaret turned to look. "That's arbutus, Lloyd. The New England woods are full of it. I think it's about our loveliest wild-flower."

"I think it must be the loveliest one that grows!" Lloyd brushed aside the leaves, and a dozen starry clusters were revealed. She let the procession pass her, even to the stately Vera Lawson and the languid Fashion Plates, while she carefully picked all the dainty flowers and then searched the sunny slope for more. Her big eyes shone. She forgot that she was still, in spite of her courage in rescuing Kittie Westervelt and her interesting experiences of ranch life, "Miss Oddity" to most of the Fair Oaks girls. Arbutus was as lovely as white columbine. These budding April woods were at once as dear to her as her native buttes and canyons, gray against a background of distant, snow-capped peaks. Dreamily Lloyd followed the rest, and when she reached the bungalow, with no trace of her usual diffidence she went up to Miss Marshall and gave her the arbutus.

"Couldn't we begin the garden to-day?" she begged. "Now is the time to transplant things, before they have waked up from their winter naps. And you must have just the wild things here—the things that belong in a wood."

Miss Marshall smiled into the girl's eager, dreamy face. "Very well," she said. "I'm afraid I'd thought of red geraniums in the piazza boxes, and nasturtiums climbing the lattices, perhaps, and pansies somewhere. But you shall plan the

garden, Lloyd, exactly as you like. And begin to plant now if you wish to."

Lloyd slipped away, only stopping to borrow a basket and a big iron spoon from Mary Ann. She forgot to meet with the committee on paint and names for the bungalow, though the chairman had carefully reminded her to do so on the way out. She even forgot luncheon. But just as the girls were ready to leave, she suddenly appeared in the bungalow sitting-room, her eyes still shining, though her shoulders drooped wearily and her hands were stained and roughened from pulling at roots and packing down damp earth.

"There's an hepatica bed by the back door," she announced breathlessly, "and I've found six different kinds of ferns. I don't know what any of them look like when they're uncurled, but they'll be lovely anyway. And the arbutus bed is planted ——"

"Oh, I ought to have told you that you can't transplant arbutus," Margaret broke in hastily. "It positively refuses to grow that way."

"It will grow for me," said Lloyd simply. Then she turned to Miss Marshall. "I've made only a tiny beginning," she said, "and there's oh, so much to be done! I hope I haven't kept you waiting, and I've had a perfectly lovely time."

If the bungalow did nothing but transform

Lloyd Mallory from a shy and awkward schoolgirl into an eager, assured young woman with confident purpose in her eyes and a complete forgetfulness of self in her manner, it would have fulfilled its mission, Miss Marshall reflected happily.

"Oh, Lloyd can do things, if she is queer," said Kittie Westervelt rather proudly, impressed by her roommate's easy fashion of treating Margaret Lewis and even the great Miss Marshall as equals.

But Lloyd wasn't the only girl who had had "a perfectly lovely time" at the bungalow-warming, nor the only one who had learned that she could assume responsibilities and fulfil them with poise and dignity.

To begin with, they had all inspected their little house, trooping in noisy procession from the three dormer-windowed bedrooms up under the roof, through the big sitting-room that, with a tiny bedroom and a tinier kitchen, occupied the whole of the first floor, down to the cellar—only there wasn't any cellar.

"Nothing but cellar stairs," laughed Margaret, leading the way down a flight of steps that started from the latticed back-porch and brought up under it, in a sawdust-strewn space evidently designed for a wood-shed, and already almost filled with neatly piled wood. In a vacant corner stood some-

thing that looked like a pump and worked like one too, when Jane experimented with the handle; only no water came.

"The water hasn't been turned on yet, I suppose," said Jane. "That is, do you turn on pumps? I don't know. Well, if I can't work the pump, I can put this slab of wood over on the pile where it belongs."

But the slab of wood refused to be moved; instead it lifted up like a trap-door, and underneath was a lovely bubbling spring, the very sight of which made everybody thirsty and sent them rushing for cups to Mary Ann, who thanked them for having thoughtfully pumped her kitchen tank full of water. So that explained the pump!

"It's a bungalow-rule that for every drink you get at the spring, you pump while you count sixty," decreed Jane. "Then there'll always be water up there for the dishes."

"And sometimes enough to flood the whole kitchen," laughed logical Margaret.

"Well, of course you must use judgment about being an exception to the rule," retorted Jane. "The lame shoulder I got before I knew that the water wouldn't come out of the spout makes me an exception for all the rest of the term, I think."

Thomas the gardener had built a roaring log fire in the brick fireplace of the living-room; and

grouped around that, on the floor and the low, broad window-seats that ran the length of the room, the committee on furniture hotly debated the relative merits of wicker and mission oak ; the committee on kitchen utensils hastily revised its list to fit the kitchen space, which had looked much bigger on paper than it did in reality ; and the committee on domestic arrangements once more went over the perplexing situation in regard to a dining-room. Would screening off part of the living-room do, or must the down-stairs bedroom be taken,—the only bedroom that was sure to be cool and airy for Miss Marshall in the heat of summer? Suddenly Mildred Wallace had an inspiration.

"We'll eat on the piazza, of course," she cried, "and cook in the latticed part, in hot weather, so as to keep the heat out of the real kitchen. We saved that place for an ice-box, but we don't need one when there's that ice-cold spring. Besides, who'd bring the ice?"

Whereupon the committee on domestic arrangements hastily repaired to the piazza. The table should go there, where a big hemlock would shelter it from the wind and sun, without shutting out the view of dear little wood-rimmed, hill-encircled Bubble Lake. The stove should go there, behind the lattice.

They rushed back to tell the kitchen committee about its suddenly acquired summer annex,—news which brought smiles of joy to the faces of those worried damsels. Before you could say "Jack Robinson," they had put a light wooden shelf over the inside stove, to use as an extra table, and were busily discussing the possibilities of the unused oven as a summer store-closet.

The committee on names and paint—supposed to be artistic and literary in make-up—waited a while for Lloyd, and then held a stormy session on a rock close to the margin of the lake, whence they could get a good view of the whole bungalow. Occasionally one of them ran down to the road, which wound past one side of the house, and walked down it, squinting thoughtfully at the little house in the woods.

"White with green blinds is like all the farmhouses up the road."

"Gray is dull and dingy."

"Green seems right to-day, but wait till the leaves are out."

"Red is too glaring for summer."

So the discussion waged, all objections and no good ideas, until a timid, silent girl, whom nobody had consulted, suggested, "No paint at all, just a brown stain that will weather nicely, and a reddish roof, to look like tiles. Then the house will nestle

down among the tree trunks and look as if it belonged here."

With a sigh of relief the committee sought Miss Marshall, who, enthroned on a packing box, was busily hearing reports, and who accepted theirs on paint with enthusiasm. But when they proffered a long list of names for her to choose from, she suggested that that part of the report should be voted upon at lunch-time. A name, which everybody would use, was too important a matter for her to settle alone.

Never had a morning flown away like this one!

"Oh, isn't it all exciting!" sighed Plain Mary Smith of the Kitchen Utensils to Margaret Lewis who headed General Furnishings.

"Yes, I never realized how much work it is just to live," said Margaret, "nor how much fun either. I'm going to help our housekeeper a lot this summer."

"Sh!" warned somebody. "They're going to read the names now."

Alice Borden was the chairman of Names and Paint. "We've thought of a lot of names," she said, "and others have made suggestions. But I'm afraid they're all either too sentimental or too sedate. It's really very complicated to choose a name that will fit this house and Miss Marshall and us, all at once," ended Alice apologetically.

Then she read the list, which began with "Lakeside" and ended with "The Nook."

"No inspirations there," whispered Jane to Nancy. Jane had originally been placed on Names and Paint, but had maneuvered herself on to General Furnishings, not because she took a deep interest in the matter of chairs and tables and beds, but because Christina and Margaret were in that division.

"Well, which name do you like best, girls?" asked Miss Marshall.

There was a murmur of vague dissatisfaction that crystallized finally in little Christina's protest.

"We want something jolly and funny, Miss Marshall. Don't you think those names are all pretty solemn?" Christina took a very big bite out of a very delicious chicken sandwich, and sighed happily, assured that the bungalow was indeed a very jolly place and therefore deserving of a better name than any on Alice's formidable list.

"I am afraid I agree with Miss Learned and the chairman that none of these names is quite what we want," explained Miss Marshall tactfully. "And the wrong name for a place like this is always worse than no name at all. We needn't decide to-day. Perhaps, after our first impressions have crystallized, the real right thing will occur

to somebody." As Miss Marshall paused, her eye chanced to catch Jane Learned's and Jane, with the promptitude of an automatic figure, answered her.

"Seldom Inn," said Jane. "We shall be seldom in, you know, Miss Marshall, but when we're all here, we're certainly an innful."

Everybody laughed and applauded and without more ado the Fair Oaks bungalow was christened, and its proud proprietors, who had insisted that three-quarters of an hour was plenty—oh, more than plenty!—of time for the walk home, were soon scurrying down the trail, making hasty side-trips after arbutus, hepaticas, and yellow adder's-tongues, or soft-footed excursions after a faint bird-note, barking back at the saucy squirrels—little Sarah Williston could have, if she liked, a kingdom of tame squirrels to look after in the woods of "Seldom Inn,"—dancing for sheer light-heartedness, lagging behind because it was all too beautiful to leave, then striding along with a sudden sense of importance, because you and you alone had chosen the curtains, or the piazza chairs, or the color, or the wall-hangings for Fair Oaks bungalow—for "Seldom Inn."

Vera Lawson chose to walk back with Nancy, first having disposed of Jeanne, whom she had managed to keep close by her side all day, to Kittie Westervelt and a friend.

"You're really not going to have riding lessons?" Vera began solicitously.

Nancy nodded. "Not this term," she said, not caring to discuss her motives with Vera.

"You're very foolish," Vera advised her seriously, "not to learn with the rest of us, while the spell of riding is on the school. And then I wanted you to ride with me," she added, with her flashing, persuasive smile.

Susceptible Nancy was tremendously flattered. It wasn't yet too late to change her mind. She could write mother to send the linen skirt at once, because she had decided to use it after all. Margaret might think she was changeable; but Margaret had said herself that every girl must decide as she thought best. Margaret hadn't given up because of Mildred and Carlene and the rest, who had to economize. The twins hadn't. Then why should she?

"It's odd," said Vera, watching Nancy's changing expression carefully, "how the Learneds lead you girls around. You march after Jane exactly like a flock of sheep. Be independent for once, dearie,—and please me at the same time. Jane Learned isn't really at all the kind of girl I should expect you to admire."

That settled the matter for Nancy, who was above all a loyal friend. She suddenly remembered

Vera's original silly quarrel with the twins, her alliance with Kittie against Lloyd, and her failure to "own up" when she had frightened Sarah, and Lloyd was being blamed for it.

"I'm being independent now, Vera," she said quietly. "My reason for giving up the lessons has nothing to do with Jane and Christina's. Of course we do generally let them plan things, because they have such lovely, comical ideas. At least Jane has."

"Has she?" asked Vera, who saw that she could succeed with Nancy only by exercising the most careful diplomacy. "Of course I don't know her as well as you do. She's probably a very entertaining and original girl. But I have noticed one thing about her; she's terribly slangy. That's why I hate to have little Jeanne Durand with her much. Jeanne belongs to a fine old French family, you know, Nancy, and they will be very much disappointed if her English isn't as pure as her French. I think we owe it to them and to ourselves, because she has been trusted to our school, to keep her from vulgar—well, from the wrong sort of associations and examples. Don't you, Nancy?"

Nancy was in a very responsible, exalted mood, after her lovely day and her final unselfish renunciation of the riding lessons. She agreed with all that Vera had said about the duty of Fair Oaks to Jeanne.

"Then," suggested Vera tactfully, "couldn't you —without mentioning me at all—hint to Jane Learned that she ought to be very careful what she says in Jeanne's hearing? If you and I don't look after the child, nobody will. The teachers aren't in a position to think of anything like this, of course. And I'm sure a hint from you is all Jane needs."

Nancy promised eagerly, and Vera joined Billy and Jeanne and Kittie on the train, assured that, though she had lost one point, she had gained a more important one. If Jane Learned couldn't use slang before Jeanne, she would avoid the little French girl; and Jeanne, who was very sensitive, would soon lose interest in her tall, awkward American namesake, and have more adoration free to bestow upon her other friend, Vera Lawson.

As she hastily dressed for dinner, Nancy remembered that she had hardly seen Grace Allen all day.

"Did you have a grand time?" she called sociably across the study.

"Very pleasant, thank you."

"If Grace was much hurt about the W. W.'s, she wouldn't answer as cordially as that," Nancy reflected. "I hope we can have another picnic there soon," she ventured, by way of making quite sure.

"I believe Miss Marshall said we might go again as soon as the house is furnished."

Grace's formal correctness began to worry Nancy. Why, if she wanted to know about the W. W.'s, didn't she ask? Nancy had hastily decided to risk the twins' displeasure by telling her.

"I've been thinking about your friendship motto," went on Grace, before Nancy had decided what to say next. "'The way to have friends is to be one,' I mean. It's true, I imagine, but I didn't suppose that friendship was so sordid."

"So what?"

Grace repeated.

"Afraid I don't know what it means," Nancy acknowledged cheerfully.

"Why, small and mean," explained Grace. "According to that motto, friendship comes down to a returning of favors. If somebody does something for you, you do something for her,—just like returning calls and invitations to parties and Christmas presents. I hadn't thought friendship was like that."

"It isn't, Grace," said Nancy earnestly. "That isn't what the proverb means. When you're a friend to a person, you want to do things for her, not because she's done things for you, but because you love her. Don't you see the difference?"

"Ye-es," Grace acknowledged grudgingly, "but

I think my meaning is the true one. Look at ——"

The dinner-gong rang then, and Nancy speedily forgot all about Grace's strange ideas of friendship. And Grace for her part apparently forgot all about the W. W.'s. Certainly she made no reference to the latest slight put upon her by this new alliance of Nancy with the twins.

That night Nancy wrote a full page in the Red Journal.

"The furniture at 'Seldom Inn' is to be green wicker in the living-room and on the piazzas, and white wicker in the bedrooms, and the teakettle is to be aluminum, because then it will last forever—almost,—so we think it's worth the extra money. (Miss Marshall is so fond of having afternoon tea that the kettle is very important.)

"I'm glad I'm on kitchen utensils. They're so little, and such a lot of different kinds, that choosing them ought to take a lot longer than deciding on chairs and tables. So our committee will be having excitement up to the very end. I do love excitement!

"I haven't done anything specially careless for quite a long while. (And the things I have done nobody knows about.) So maybe I am improving. I wonder whether it's more important to think about improving yourself or looking out for

other people. Margaret can do both, but I'm afraid I can't. I think that little verse of Stevenson's would be truer if it said :

> " The world is too full of a number of things,
> Or I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."

But just the same I like the world best just as it is—a big fascinating muddle of bungalows to be furnished, and French girls who mustn't learn slang (I must speak to Jane right away about that), and crews with splendid captains like Billy, and bureau drawers to keep tidy, and algebra, and mothers. I must write to mine this very minute.—N. Lee."

CHAPTER VI

A PLOT AND A PRINCESS

THE Princess had sent for her Real Girls. In a wobbly little penciled note to Nancy she explained that she had been ill but was well enough now to have callers.

"They say two at once is all I can have this very first time," she wrote regretfully, "so I choose my very two oldest friends, and send my love to Lloyd."

Of course, under the circumstances, they must go that very afternoon. Nancy secured Miss Marshall's permission and informed Sarah, who listened in wide-eyed delight, that the bad fairies had taken their spell from the Enchanted Castle.

"You see the principal bad fairy got suspicious of Prince Charming," explained Nancy. "She found out that he's a Prince in disguise, instead of just a furry-purry kitten. So she was afraid and ran away. That's why the doors of the Castle are open again, and we can go in."

"Yes," breathed Sarah, afraid of saying anything to bring the story to an end.

"I don't believe that bad fairy will ever dare to

come back," added Nancy. "I think she's a rain-and-winter fairy, who hates flowers and sunshine and summer. So between summer and the Prince, the dear little Princess is going to be all right now."

"I'm so glad!" sighed Sarah.

"So am I," agreed Nancy, starting off up-stairs.

"Here's another day when I can't go out for crew-practice," she complained sadly to Grace. "It seems as if I was fated to miss it."

"You needn't have gone walking yesterday."

"But I wanted so to see that new tea-place that all the girls are talking about," said Nancy. "And I thought of course I could row to-day. Well, hereafter I'm going to be—oh, so regular! You see, until day before yesterday I was pretty hopeless about getting on the crew, because I was sure that Margaret Lewis would go on ahead of me. But now that Dorothy Parsons has hurt her wrist, there'll be at least two places vacant, and I do want one of them!"

"You've rowed a lot, haven't you?"

Nancy nodded. "Every summer since I can remember. Dick says I'm very extra good—for a girl. So missing one or two practices ought not to matter much."

"Perhaps not," said methodical Grace. "Still, a crew must learn to row together, of course, and

then the principle of the thing is that everybody should turn out."

"Oh, yes, I know," sighed Nancy. "Well, hereafter I'm going to be as regular as—as you would be, Grace Allen. I can't say more than that."

The Princess looked littler and more fragile than ever after her illness. Prettier than ever too, in her frilly white negligée, with her wavy hair in two long braids on her shoulders like a girl's, and her big dark eyes bright with the excitement of having company.

"It's so stupid being ill," she told them. "In spring time, too, when the daffodils are out. Oh, they pick them for me,"—she pointed to a great golden bunch in the window,—"but that's not the same thing. I want to be out there myself, helping all the flowers to grow. I'm going to get well quick, and then stay well. Yes, I am!" The Princess stamped her little foot in its high-heeled satin slipper.

"We think so too," piped little Sarah. "We think the Prince and the sunshine have driven the bad fairy away." Sarah, who was holding Prince Charming, gave him a grateful hug in recognition of his services in the Princess's behalf.

"The bad fairy?" asked the little Princess in perplexity.

Sarah nodded vigorously. "You 'splain," she ordered Nancy, and Nancy, blushing for fear the Princess would think it was silly, explained as briefly as possible.

But the Princess thought it was lovely! She adored fairy tales, about fair princesses and enchanted castles and gallant princes, but she had never expected to be in one herself.

"I shall think of it when I'm lying awake at night," she said, "and in the morning it will be something nice to wake up for. Somehow there isn't much to wake up for nowadays," she ended pathetically.

"Pretty soon you can go out and sit in the garden," suggested Nancy.

"Why don't you have a party pretty soon?" added little Sarah. "Parties are awful nice to think about beforehand."

"Yes, indeed they are," agreed the Princess, shaking her head at Nancy, who was trying to silence her small charge. "'Specially fairy parties. But I'm afraid it will be a long time before they'll let me have anything as grand as a fairy party. Perhaps we could have a quiet little tea-party—just us three and Lloyd—before long."

"And Prince Charming," put in Sarah hastily. "Isn't it most time for Prince Charming to have a birthday, Nancy?"

"Oh, I'm sure it is," cried the Princess eagerly, answering for Nancy. "I'm sure it will be time in about—about two weeks, maybe. I'll find out, —from the fairies, you know, or maybe from the Prince himself,—and let you know."

"Annette used to have lots of parties," announced Sarah, "when I was at home to see to it."

The Princess smiled at Sarah's reminiscences, but Nancy noticed that her little head had dropped wearily back against the cushions of her easy chair.

"We'd better go now—and let you talk to the fairies," she said; and the Princess thought perhaps they would better. It might hurry up the birthday party.

As they crossed the school grounds, Plain Mary Smith rushed up to Nancy. "I want to see you right away," she whispered breathlessly. "It's awfully important, and very private."

"Then let's go up in the Crooked Elm," suggested Nancy. "There's nobody there now. Sarah, you run off and hunt for those squirrels of yours."

Sarah ran off contentedly enough, and the other two climbed the ladder into the big elm, Nancy quick as a cat, and Mary lumbering after her with the timorous uncertainty of a fat, frightened seal.

When they had found comfortable seats, and Mary had caught her breath, she blurted out her story. "He's coming up here—my new guardian, I mean. He's written to say so. He's coming within two weeks. And for all I've gone without desserts, and exercised like anything, I've gained back that quarter of a pound."

"All of it?" demanded Nancy, with mock seriousness.

"Every bit," sighed Plain Mary. "Perhaps if you'd had time to play tennis with me, Nancy, it would have been different. Kittie Westervelt was the best player I could get hold of, and she's awfully slow about chasing balls. So playing with her isn't very strenuous."

"Oh, Mary, you're too funny!" cried Nancy, bursting into a merry peal of laughter. "As if a quarter of a pound mattered! Nobody could notice a quarter of a pound, you silly girl!"

"But I want to lose pounds and pounds and pounds," declared Mary vehemently. "I want to be slim and graceful like you."

"You couldn't hope to get awfully slim in two weeks," Nancy told her critically.

"Well, I want to begin, at least," said poor Mary. "I thought I had the whole term to do it in, you see. I never thought of my guardian's coming up to see me. The other one never came."

"Is this one fun?" asked Nancy.

"Well, I don't exactly know," confessed Plain Mary doubtfully. "You see," she added, in explanation, "I've always had two guardians, but this one never paid any attention to me. Now the other one has gone to Europe to live; so this one has to look after me. I stayed with my old one this vacation, just as usual, and the new one came to see me twice to get acquainted. Once he brought me candy, and once he didn't. I don't know whether or not you'd call him fun. But—oh, nothing!" Plain Mary came to a sudden, confused halt.

"The only thing you seem to be sure of about him," said Nancy, "is that he likes slender girls. I don't think it was very tactful of him to say that to you, Mary."

"Oh, he just happened to mention it," explained Plain Mary hastily. "I don't believe he meant me to notice. But you see—oh, he's the kind of person that you like to please. You know what I mean, Nancy," ended Plain Mary, plunged again into confusion.

Nancy nodded soberly. She was thinking how dreadful it must be to have two guardians instead of a regular family, and then to have the one you knew rush off to Europe to live, leaving you to get on as best you might with the other—who didn't

like your kind of girl. Naturally poor Mary wanted to please him. She had chosen a silly way, perhaps; but that was her own affair. So, "I'll help you all I can, Mary," Nancy promised comfortingly. "I'll play tennis—I can't to-morrow, because of the crew-practice, but Margaret will. No, Margaret can't either. Well, somebody will. And why don't you try not sitting down for twenty minutes after each meal? I remember a stout woman at the shore used to do that. And—oh, let's go and consult Jane! That's what I do whenever I'm in a fix, and she's got me out of two beautifully. She does it by covering things up. I don't see how you can cover up being fat; but perhaps Jane will. There she comes now, up from the boat-house. Shall I call her?"

"She'll tease me so!" demurred Mary.

"I won't let her."

"She'll tell the other girls."

"Never, if we ask her to keep it a secret."

"All right. Jane! Jane! Jane Learned! Come up here," cried Mary at the top of her lungs.

Jane, upon being hastily put in touch with the crisis in Plain Mary's career, took command of the situation like the born manager she was.

"You can do anything in two weeks," she declared, with fine optimism. "Eat as little as you can, Mary, and keep moving. Above all adopt

my favorite maxim: What you have never done before, you can do again. And the minute I have a regular inspiration for you, I'll let you know."

Jane's inspiration came that evening, exactly in the middle of the study-hour, with disastrous results to Jane's next day's history lesson.

"It's not exactly an inspiration," she announced, appearing, on the very stroke of the release bell, at Nancy's side. "It's just a sort of an idea that I can't quite think how to develop."

"You talk like a rhetoric outline," said Nancy. "What's your idea?"

"That the most thinning experience in this little old school is fagging for Vera Lawson. If only Mary Smith were crazy about Vera we shouldn't need to give her troubles another thought."

"But she isn't crazy about Vera."

"She would be easily enough, if Vera encouraged her the least little bit. Couldn't we manage it somehow?"

"I might tell Kittie," suggested Nancy, "that Plain Mary adores Vera from afar, and longs to do things for her. I think Kittie would be sure to tell Vera, because she hates dusting and running errands and lugging books and boat-cushions, and washing dishes after Vera's spreads. It's perfectly astonishing the way Vera makes girls work for her."

"It is indeed, and it will do wonders for Plain Mary's figure. You go this minute and tell Kittie, and hint as broadly as you dare that she go right off and tell Vera. Then I'll send Christina over to the Junior House—as my recent deportment marks do not permit me to leave the dormitory after hours—to sow the seeds of Vera-worship in Mary's susceptible heart. After that we will patiently await developments."

Next morning at breakfast, Vera, who had been duly enlightened by Kittie as to the identity of her newest admirer, bestowed a dazzling smile upon Plain Mary. Plain Mary, with Christina's eulogies fresh in her mind, capitulated at once. That afternoon she trotted patiently back and forth across the archery field, hunting Vera's arrows. After dinner she ran three times from the gym. to the Senior House and back, on Vera's errands. Next morning she was up half an hour earlier to copy history notes for her idol, losing an extra half-pound in her anxiety over the difficult matter of waking up in time.

Meanwhile Nancy had made out a tennis schedule, in which poor, panting Mary was daily pitted against the best Fair Oaks players. Tired but triumphant, Mary reported her daily progress; and daily her two trainers urged her inexorably to greater efforts.

Nancy pinned her faith to the tennis matches, but Jane declared that fagging for Vera was more effective.

"Anyhow," added Jane, "something is working so scrumptiously that I'm pretty proud of us. By the way, Nancy, I'm thinking of starting a Fault Factory."

"A what?"

"Faults cured while you wait," explained Jane. "Applicants given special attention, and others more so. For instance you applied ——"

"But I wasn't cured. All you've done is to cover up some of my carelessnesses."

"I have also impressed upon you how careless you've been each time," said Jane. "That ought to help. Besides, you're a specially hopeless case, Miss I-Forgot. But so far you've been a very useful assistant to the head of the Factory, which is myself, and I hope you will be willing to continue in that capacity."

"If you mean that I've helped about Plain Mary," said Nancy, "I have. But I shouldn't call being fat exactly a fault."

"Isn't it generally the result of being somewhat lazy and greedy?" retorted Jane.

Nancy laughed. "Poor Mary! How you do pick her to pieces, Jane. I think the cases that don't apply are the ones that will be the most fun

to cure, because they won't know what we're doing to them. But I suppose," she added laughingly, "that we'd better begin at home. At least I had." Just at that moment Nancy opportunely remembered Vera Lawson's suggestion about Jeanne. "Your worst fault, Jane," she went on quickly, "is being so slangy. You'd better put the Fault Factory to work on that, specially now that Jeanne Durand is around here so much. It's really a shame for us to spoil her English by letting her hear our careless talk."

Jane stared in amazement. "Who put that queer notion into your head?"

"It's not a queer notion," said Nancy indignantly. "We owe it to Jeanne's family and the honor of the school to see that she learns pure English."

"Then keep her out of my way," said Jane curtly, taking the suggestion just as Vera had anticipated she would. "I'm sure I don't want to annoy her family or stain the honor of the school."

"But couldn't you try ——"

"No," said Jane decidedly, "I couldn't—not at present. One case at a time is the limit of my Fault Factory's capacity. We're running overtime now on Plain Mary. When the Ogre has come and gone, and Mary ceases to be quite so

strenuous in well-doing, we can take another case —if we don't decide to close down instead."

"What do you mean by the Ogre?" asked Nancy curiously.

"Plain Mary's new guardian, of course," returned Jane. "He's a cruel old tyrant, as far as I can see, so I've named him the Ogre. Plain Mary looked rather horrified when I called him so to her. I believe she rather likes him in spite of all the trouble he's making her."

"Well, I'm certainly glad you mentioned ogres," said Nancy. "I've thought and thought and I couldn't think of any more stories to tell Sarah. Now I'll put in an ogre. We haven't had a single one yet, and young Sarah will be perfectly delighted."

CHAPTER VII

A SACRIFICE TO THE OGRE

"THE Ogre is coming to-morrow. He's telegraphed Plain Mary to be ready to go driving with him at four, and she's to ask four of her friends and a chaperon to go too."

"And are you one of the four?" asked Jane of Nancy Lee, who had rushed up between classes to tell her coadjutor the exciting news.

Nancy nodded. "So are you, Jane; and the others are to be Kittie Westervelt and Vera Lawson. Miss Dutton is going to chaperon."

"Why Kittie?" demanded Jane.

"Because she's so very slim and stylish, I suppose," laughed Nancy, hurrying away to her next class.

That afternoon after luncheon, three of Mary's four guests held an anxious conference.

"I don't care much about going," said Kittie sadly. "Driving seems so out of date and poky nowadays."

"I know it," agreed Nancy. "I shall have to

cut crew-practice again, too. But I'm afraid Mary will feel hurt if we don't go."

"We'd better be thinking up some improving conversation," put in Jane. "Ogres—ahem—fussy old gentlemen are generally awfully hard to talk to."

"I suppose he's sure to be old, but how do you know he's fussy?" demanded Kittie dejectedly.

Jane shrugged. "I have a presentiment."

Kittie sighed. "What shall we wear?"

"Mary will want us to look nice," Nancy told her.

"And slim," added Jane tantalizingly.

Kittie looked hard at Jane, but wisely forebore to ask for an explanation. "I just hope it will rain to-morrow," she declared at last, with another deep sigh. "Mary can't care especially about going driving, and it's certainly a great bore to us and to poor dear Vera."

"She little knows how her stylish slenderness is destined to propitiate the Ogre, who demands sacrifices of us all," said Jane, when Kittie had departed. "Let's go now and cheer up Mary for a minute."

Strange to say, Mary needed no cheering. She was excited, but not at all dismayed, by the prospect of the Ogre's visit. She seemed to regard an afternoon's drive as a very pleasant diversion; and

the only cloud on her horizon was the sad fact that, though ten pounds is amazingly difficult to lose, it may still leave a person as far as ever from the acquisition of real slenderness.

"Still, I do look a little thinner," said Mary sadly.

"Of course you do," Nancy encouraged her. "You must invite your guardian to come again, Mary, and you must keep right on training. After a few weeks more, he can't help but notice a big difference."

"And you must dress the part to-morrow," put in Jane. "We'll be over later in the afternoon, when we have more time, to consider the vital question of clothes—especially hats. Have all the possibilities spread out on your bed for our inspection, Mary."

It was speedily decided that Mary looked nearest to slenderness in her blue serge suit. The problem of hats was a more difficult one; Jane summarily declared all of Mary's perfectly hopeless, and hurried her over to the third floor of the big dormitory, where, after much consideration, a large black hat of Christina's was pronounced, by Nancy, Jane, and its owner, to be extremely becoming to Mary's round red face.

"That's over, thank goodness!" said Jane, as Mary went off, beaming her gratitude. "And so

is this lovely afternoon. I certainly hope the Ogre will appreciate all the trouble we've taken for him."

"And I hope he isn't awfully old and awfully frightening," said Nancy. "Has Mary told you much about him, Jane?"

"Absolutely nothing. She responds 'Not exactly,' or, 'I shouldn't say just that,' to all my polite inquiries."

"So does she to mine," laughed Nancy.

"From which," went on Jane, "we can only hope for the worst."

Nancy nodded sympathetically. "Poor Mary! We must see her through this time, and then, if the Ogre ever comes again, perhaps we can persuade her to invite somebody else to go driving with them."

"We will tell her that variety is the spice of an Ogre's life," said Jane. "Now go away, while I think up some improving conversation for tomorrow."

At quarter to four the next day—which was not rainy—Fair Oaks School was wrapped in the quiet of the afternoon study-hour. Only Kittie Westervelt was out on the deserted campus. Having finally decided that she was much too tired to dress up and go for a poky drive, Kittie had secured permission to run over to Plain Mary's

room to explain that she had a headache—Kittie could always conjure up a headache to order. As she stood for a minute on the dormitory porch, basking in the afternoon sunshine and thinking just how she should word her excuses, a big gray touring-car swept up Holly Road. At a pace that sent the shivers coursing up and down even Kittie's experienced spine, it took the sharp turn into the school campus, driven by a reckless creature completely disguised in smoked-glass goggles, a wide-visored cap, and a wrinkled gray dust-coat. It brought up under the carriage-entrance with a jerk, a snort, and a peal of its three-toned Gabriel horn. Then the goggled, muffled creature stood up, stretched his cramped shoulders, removed the disguising goggles, cap, and dust-coat, and, having thus transformed himself into a tall, well-groomed, keen-eyed young man, with a becoming dash of gray on his temples, he took a swift survey of his surroundings, strode up the steps, and rang the bell, with the assured air of a person who is expected.

Kittie, meanwhile, having bestowed on all the appointments of the car, including its driver, the keen approval of an expert, had retreated into a dark nook at the end of the hall. She was not dressed to encounter a good-looking man ; and besides, she was consumed with curiosity to know

what had brought him to Fair Oaks, where men were a decided rarity.

"Will you take my card to Miss Mary P. Smith?" this man was saying, in a voice that matched his fine eyes and his business-likes tride. "I'm a few moments before my time, I think. Tell her not to hurry. I'm to wait in there? Thank you."

The curtains of the little pink and gold reception room fell together with a soft swish behind him, and Kittie Westervelt, pale with excitement, bounded up the stairs, unhooking her gingham school-dress as she ran. Never had Kittie dressed so fast. Fortunately there are some things that do not matter when you intend to wear a veil and a natty ulster over everything else. Only five minutes after the hour, Kittie, wreathed in smiles and pink chiffon, tripped down the stairs, to be met by a radiant Plain Mary, who whispered, as she escorted her friend to meet the Ogre, "How ever did you know he meant an automobile?"

"Why, I should know it just to look at him!" whispered back Kittie loftily, feeling that for once providence was strongly on her side, and against teasing, misleading Jane Learned.

But the omniscient Jane was wearing a rather dazed expression, and Nancy's eyes were round with astonishment. Only Vera was nonchalant—

Vera who never allowed surprises to disturb her complacent serenity. She was talking to the Ogre, whose other name was Dr. Arnold James, with a prettily deferential manner which she considered appropriate for guardians, but which seemed to amuse this particular guardian immensely.

"I hope you've decided where we'd better go, Mary," he turned rather abruptly away from Vera to say. "Can't we manage to have tea somewhere? There's a lot of candy piled up on the back seat."

"Oh, thank you, Dr. James," said Mary politely.

"Why, I thought we'd settled that you should call me Dr. Jim," objected the Ogre, "as all my other good friends do."

"What a nice name!" cried Nancy impulsively.

"Use it, if you like it," the Ogre told her graciously. "You see, Miss Nancy, I hope to have a lot of good friends up here soon, because I expect to have to come up often this spring. Oh, not to see you, young lady!" with a warning head-shake at Mary. "But I have a very old friend in town, who's also a patient of mine at present. And of course, when I'm in the neighborhood on other business, I naturally want to look up my ward. Is that the chaperon, Mary? Allow me to congratulate you on having secured such a young and pretty one."

The candy was delicious, and there seemed to be boxes and boxes of it. Dr. Jim was inconsolable when he discovered that the girls couldn't take any back with them.

"Then eat it all up now, to save it," he commanded, producing a delectable new kind. He twitted Mary on her lack of appetite, and Kittie on her superabundance of pink chiffon, begging her to share with Mary, who had stoutly refused to change her big hat, and was having all sorts of trouble to keep it on.

"Too bad we have to crawl along so, on account of that hat," laughed Dr. Jim, mischievously speeding up to the very limit the law allowed, while Mary breathed hard and clung desperately to her flapping black sail.

Dr. Jim's idea of tea, which they drank at the new tea-shop on the slope of Sunset Hill, was delightfully comprehensive. Mary cast one shamed look at Jane and Nancy, and then devoted herself to spice cake, chocolate éclairs, nut sandwiches, and currant tarts with an ardor that Dr. Jim applauded.

"That's right, Mary," he said. "Take more cake. I haven't any use at all for bird-like appetites." And poor Mary, perplexed but happy, obeyed.

Jane forgot all the improving conversation she

had prepared for the occasion and was her comical, jolly self; while Nancy revised her hazy opinions of guardians and decided that if you could only have some in addition to your regular family, life would indeed be perfect. Vera and Kittie enjoyed the excursion with reservations natural to persons of their critical taste, and Miss Dutton looked as if she wished all chaperoning would turn out to be as amusing as going driving with Dr. Jim.

Back in time for dinner, though not at all hungry, Mary's guests thanked Dr. Jim, begged him to have to come again soon, and said good-bye, leaving Mary to take a more intimate farewell of her guardian in private.

"Why did you tell me he was old and fussy?" Kittie demanded of Jane, the instant they were out of ear-shot.

"Because I thought so," retorted Jane.

"We did," corroborated Nancy. "Honestly we did! Just wait till we get hold of Mary Smith! She's the guilty party, not we, Kittie."

"Why, that girl can fool people as well as I can!" declared Jane admiringly.

When Mary arrived, a little later, at the dinner-table, and slipped into her place, which happened opportunely to be between Jane and Nancy, she seemed much amazed at Jane's stern, "It's high time you gave an account of yourself."

"Why, I haven't been long," said Mary, beaming joyously upon her two trainers. "He did notice that I was thinner, girls, and he was pleased. But he told me not to overdo it, and always to make an exception of his tea-parties. And he liked you two best, though he liked Vera too, only he thought she was harder to get acquainted with. And who do you think is the old friend that he has to come up often to see?"

"It's no use your trying to flatter us and divert our minds, Mary," said Jane sternly, fastening accusing eyes on Mary's round, innocent face. "Why have you repaid our kindness by base deception?"

Mary looked completely puzzled.

"Why didn't you tell us that he wasn't an Ogre?" explained Nancy.

Mary still stared. "I never said he was," she defended herself at last. "Jane made it up."

"But why didn't you say that he wasn't old and fussy, and that he was jolly and amusing and awfully nice?"

"I did say that he wasn't specially old," Mary reminded them. "And I said I liked him, and that he wasn't exactly strict, but only rather particular. And he is—he told me so himself tonight," ended Mary triumphantly.

"Just the same, Mary P. Smith," pursued Jane,

"you wilfully deceived us. You knew your guardian was a perfect peach, and you didn't tell."

"Do you really think he's a perfect peach?" demanded Plain Mary, beaming.

"Of course," chorused her two friends.

"Well, maybe if I'd told you he was one, you wouldn't think so," returned Plain Mary, thereby exhibiting a profound philosophy of life that gave the lie to her general reputation for obtuseness. And beyond that simple statement, Plain Mary pointedly refused to discuss the attractiveness of Dr. Jim.

"You haven't told us who his old friend is," said Nancy at last.

"Guess!"

"Is it somebody we know?"

"Jane knows of her, and Nancy knows her well."

"It isn't Mrs. Barton?" said Nancy, because Mrs. Barton was the only person in the village whom she knew well.

Mary nodded. "Next time he comes, maybe, he's going to take me to see her. He wants us to be friends, too."

"How funny!" laughed Nancy. "The Ogre knows the Princess."

Everybody at Fair Oaks had heard more or less

about little Sarah's Enchanted Castle; so Jane and Mary understood Nancy's allusion.

"I must have had a presentiment when I named him," Jane declared, "that he belonged in the Castle story. But I may say it was a pretty poor presentiment that staged him for the Ogre instead of the Prince."

"But there's a prince already, Jane," Nancy objected. "You've forgotten dear little Prince Charming. He's in disguise at present, but he's a prince all the same."

"Oh, all right," said Jane. "Of course some stories have two princes in 'em, but it doesn't matter. Ogre Dr. Jim has been named, and Ogre he shall be called, until such time as I, J. Learned, maker of nicknames, shall officially designate him otherwise. Mary, couldn't you persuade the Ogre to come again next week?"

CHAPTER VIII

THAT IMPROVING QUOTATION

"You think me—what you say?—not hones'?" asked little Jeanne Durand, gazing up appealingly into Nancy Lee's face. "And now at last you forgive?"

It was the night before May Day. "Seldom Inn" was as nearly finished as a new house ever is before it has been lived in a while, and the Fair Oaks girls were to have a May party there the next day. In honor of this event, the W. W.'s had initiated the three waifs-and-strays into the new society, and Nancy had gone to Jeanne's room after the initiation to help her cut out and sew on her mystic letters.

"I don't understand, Jeanne," said Nancy, much puzzled by Jeanne's odd questions. "That is, I understand the words—you speak English beautifully now, Jeanne—but I don't understand what you are referring to. Why do I think you not honest? And what is there for me to forgive?"

"Ah, nothing, in reality," explained Jeanne, with a quick gesture of denial. "It is a joke, as I shall explain. But perhaps you have not heard?

Ah, that is best, because now you will not be offend. But you stay away from me, and Mademoiselle Jane also, so I think you like me not any more."

Nancy hastily decided not to attempt any explanation of Vera's plan for keeping Jeanne's English pure, which was, of course, the reason for Jane's recent avoidance of the little French girl, and consequently for Nancy's seeing less of her. The situation was complicated enough already.

So, "It wasn't that at all," Nancy reassured Jeanne quite truthfully. "It—well, it just happened so. For one thing we've both been very busy. Now do hurry and explain."

"You shall hear," Jeanne began quaintly. "That first day you recall how you find me with tears?"

"In tears, Jeanne," Nancy corrected.

"Ah, thank you! You find me in tears, and you make explanation to me of 'unpack,' and I make explanation to you of why I am here."

Nancy laughed. "Yes, I remember. But I shall have to confess, Jeanne, that I didn't understand a bit of your explanation. I pretended I did, because the dressing-bell rang, and that was something you had to know about right away. So I said, '*Oui, oui! Eh, bien! Certainement,*'

just as if I understood perfectly,—so that you would stop and I could tell you about the bell. I intended to own up and ask you to repeat your story right after dinner, but I couldn't, for some reason, and then, as usual, I forgot."

"*Oh, c'est drôle, n'est ce pas? Attendez maintenant! Mon oncle qui* ——"

"Oh, tell it in English, please," begged Nancy. "I'm too sleepy to-night to listen to anything important in French."

"It shall be as you wish," agreed Jeanne. "I have told you that first day how my father, who was a notary of Amiens, die and leave us,—my mother and my little brothers and me,—all very poor; and how my uncle, who make himself rich in New York, send for me to come and learn the American ways, that I may teach the American misses to speak French, in New York or maybe in Paris, where they come, so many each year. My uncle he is wise. He say, 'Jeanne, you shall go to a good school, where you may see the real life of the country. Then you know how to please—how to act in the American homes—and you have no trouble to find the good engagement to teach. And the good school will be glad for you to come, because you have the manners polite and the accent elegant.' So here I have come."

"I'm so glad you did come here, Jeanne,"

Nancy told her heartily. "You've taught me a lot of French, but that's not why I'm the gladdest. It's because I enjoy knowing you. And when you are ready to take pupils, I'm sure all the girls will be glad to help you in any way that they can."

"Thank you!" said Jeanne, with her shy, sweet smile. "And now for the joke—the naughty joke I play on Mademoiselle Vera. But if she wish not to be made in a joke, why will she ask the silly questions and—what you say—drink up all that I speak?"

"Drink in all you say, Jeanne," interposed Nancy.

"Drink in all that I say," repeated Jeanne painstakingly. "She is what Miss Jane call the 'easy-mark,' is it not? And she is—she is—she love the rich and look down on the poor. What is that in your language, Nancy?"

"You mean that she's rather a snob, perhaps," suggested Nancy.

Jeanne eagerly agreed. "So when she, the snob, ask me of my home and my people, I let her have a story to please herself. I say nothing, and she talk. She gives me a proud family and a grand château by the sea, in Brittany; and she make it that I come here to learn to be of an interest in my grand society, where I dance and chatter and wear fine clothes and do nothing all the days.

And I 'make a hit,' as Miss Jane say, because I have been educate in America and tell the story *comique* of all that I see and do. She makes it all grand like that, and I take what she makes for me, because she is so very silly. Now, do you forgive?"

"Oh, Jeanne!" Nancy's voice shook with merriment. "Did you actually tell Vera all that, and she believes it?"

"I let her tell—*bien différent*," insisted the French girl. "I say only a little word to start her, and another little word to lead her astray, and *voilà mon château, ma grande famille, toutes les choses splendides!* Ah, yes, she believes! She believes something grander every day."

"It's certainly a beautiful joke," said Nancy, "though I don't suppose it is quite 'hones'," as you say. When are you going to tell her the truth, Jeanne?"

Jeanne's wan little face grew very sad. "Ah, that is the matter! When to tell, and how to tell! She has been a friend to me, despite her silliness, and she is not the one to see the joke and laugh at herself and me, like Miss Jane always will do. I wish I had never taken her château and all her splendid things." Jeanne tossed all the splendor away with one of her vivid Gallic gestures.

"Well, you'd better tell her the truth pretty

soon," advised Nancy, "before she's made you take many more wonderful things. Or else you'd better not tell her at all. What harm would that do? It's such a good joke!"

"But a joke not ended—not understood—brings trouble, perhaps," said Jeanne. "I must decide! I must think! And for the present we do not sew the letters, and you do not tell me about your May Day in America, so that I shall not be too 'green,' as Miss Jane will say, to-morrow."

"May Day isn't anything much," explained Nancy, busily pinning on Jeanne's "feature." "Do you know about May baskets? We're going to fill ours in the woods, and have them for luncheon favors. It's just a picnic luncheon, you know. My cooking class has charge of it, and I'm the class chairman. I ought to go over my list with Miss Dutton again before bedtime. Can you sew the letters now, Jeanne? And don't show them to any one till to-morrow morning, remember."

The next morning was a busy one for everybody, but it was positively distracting for Nancy Lee, whose cooking division had trustfully chosen her its chairman. As the banner division for the month, they had been given the honor of planning, helping to prepare, and packing the May Day luncheon; and they were bound to show themselves worthy of their trust. Assisted by the faith-

ful Mary Ann and by Thomas the gardener, they worked like beavers, getting up before breakfast to spread sandwiches, and leaving the table at the first opportunity to finish packing all the goodies into hampers, baskets, and boxes for transportation to "Seldom Inn."

"It must have been a fearful bother the last time," said Mildred Wallace, deftly wrapping piles of cookies in oiled paper. "They had things pretty well systematized before they let us try our hands."

"Yes," agreed Nancy, who was flying about, checking up her list of necessaries. "But it's a good deal of work just to carry the system out. How many eggs in that box, Alice? Well, where are the rest? No, those are all cookies. Oh, dear!" Plain Mary Smith, traveling with her usual disregard for others, had bumped into Nancy with a huge plate of olive sandwiches.

"I'm sorry, but only one fell off, and I'll eat one less this noon to make up," said Plain Mary, stooping to pick up the débris.

"Look at my skirt, though!" Nancy rubbed at a greasy daub of mayonnaise with her handkerchief. "And I spilled cocoa on it at breakfast. I shall simply have to change. Here, Margaret, you take the list, and try to find the rest of those eggs. I've checked it down to there." And Nancy flew off to repair damages.

She was back in five minutes, quite calmed by her chance discovery that her watch was half an hour fast. Margaret had found the missing eggs. The committee dispatched Thomas and Mary Ann in the station-wagon with the heaviest baskets, carried the rest of the luncheon to the hall-table, congratulated one another on having finished the work on time, and trooped rather wearily off after hats, wraps, and personal impedimenta for the day's outing.

It took Nancy only a minute to pin on her "near-Panama," pull down her gray sweater from its hook, and start off down-stairs again. Half-way through the corridor she halted. "I wonder where Grace can be," she considered. "I ought to tell her that I've borrowed a clean handkerchief, because I couldn't find mine,—or else they're all at the laundry. I'm sure she won't care, but, seeing it's Grace, I'd rather tell her right off. I might wait a minute, I suppose, and perhaps she'll come in."

But when Nancy opened the study-door, there sat Grace at her desk, exactly as if it was any unexciting school-day morning, and she was getting ready for her first class.

"Why, Grace, where did you come from?" cried astonished Nancy. "Oh, you must have been in your bedroom all the time I was putting on my

hat. But you were so still that I never thought to call."

"Yes," said Grace calmly, "I was there. I didn't know you wanted me."

"Just wanted to tell you that I borrowed a handkerchief a while ago, when you certainly weren't here," explained Nancy cheerfully. "You don't mind, do you? I couldn't find any of mine."

"You're very welcome to a handkerchief," said Grace, turning back to her book.

"Goodness, Grace!" protested Nancy. "Don't try to study now. You haven't time to start, even. Put on your hat and come along down-stairs with me."

"I'm not going down just now."

"But it's almost time—it is time," declared Nancy, forgetting, in her excitement, to subtract that extra thirty minutes from the hour her watch indicated. "It is time now to start on the picnic."

"I'm not going on the picnic," said Grace quietly.

Nancy stared. "Why not? Don't you feel well, Grace?"

"N-not very."

"The air will do you good. You'll forget all about how you feel when you're rushing around in the woods, filling May baskets for all your dearest friends."

"I'm not going. You'd better start along, Nancy. And I hope you'll have a splendid time."

"I shan't unless you tell me ——" A sudden thought cut short Nancy's sentence. "Grace Allen, is it because ——" Nancy darted across the study and into Grace's dainty little bedroom. Yes, there on the "Neatness and Order card" that hung by the bed, below the long unbroken line of gold stars that stood for "Perfect," was a fatal red circle that stood for untidiness. Nancy had several red circles in her room, besides several blue squares that stood for "Mediocre," but never before had Grace's dainty little boudoir been desecrated by such a mark of disgrace.

Nancy rushed out into the study, and across to her bedroom. Yes, there was a gold star on her card that hadn't been there last night.

The "Neatness and Order" records at Fair Oaks were taken at irregular intervals; when you least expected it, when you were not there to make a mute appeal for mercy, the coveted star, the tolerable square, or the hateful circle would appear on your card. That was what had happened this morning. And at the last assembly Miss Marshall had given a warning: "We're growing careless, I'm afraid, about keeping our rooms in order. The Fair Oaks girl who does her work as she should—follows the bells that are rung to guide her—need

never be in too much haste to leave her possessions in order. But now every holiday, every special occasion means, to some of us, an excuse for letting things get into inexcusable confusion. I'm sorry to say that, when the record is taken next, the girls who have been careless must expect to pay a special penalty. So don't be one of those girls!"

Nancy walked slowly out into the study and up to the desk where Grace sat, apparently absorbed in cube roots.

"Grace," she demanded sharply, "is it because of the red circle that you aren't going? Is staying at home to-day the special penalty that Miss Marshall spoke about?"

"U-um, yes, it is. Please go down, Nancy."

"I'm going," said Nancy calmly. "I'm going this minute to tell Miss Marshall that I left your top drawer open, after I'd mussed it up hunting a handkerchief. As I rushed out, something tumbled ——"

"A chair, and a work-box off the table," supplied Grace.

"Did you know that I did it?" demanded Nancy.

Grace said nothing.

"Then why in creation," demanded her exasperated roommate sharply, "didn't you explain to me when I first asked you? Now be all ready

to start when I come back with the word that you're to go on the picnic."

"Oh, Nancy, I never meant you to know! I don't want you to explain. Please go on the picnic and have a good time! I want to stay at home for you. Indeed, indeed I do! Don't spoil it all for me!" Tears in her eyes, her voice a wail of despair, Grace stood up to face her bewildered, dismayed roommate, who had to curb her desperate desire to find Miss Marshall and set matters straight in a hurry, until she had soothed the tempest of Grace's distress.

"It was awfully dear of you to mean to let me go without knowing," Nancy assured her heartily. "But now that I know, of course I can't let you do anything of the kind."

"But I want to!" wailed Grace. "Indeed I want to. Oh, Nancy, don't you see that it's friendship? I've tried so hard to find a chance to be a friend to somebody and now—now you—won't—let me!"

"No, I won't," said Nancy firmly. "I couldn't let my very dearest friend take the blame for a thing I'd done. I should feel like a sneak, and be acting like one, too. Now please try to see it my way, because I must go this very minute to find Miss Marshall." And off she rushed down the hall.

"Nancy, did Thomas take the chicken sandwiches?"

"Nancy Lee, you're late. We thought you'd forgotten the picnic." This from Jane, the tease, with significant emphasis on "forgotten."

"Nancy, come and walk down with us."

"Have you brought all the lists, Nancy?"

"I can't stop just now," returned Nancy breathlessly to all inquiries. "Please let me pass. I can't stop now, truly I can't."

Miss Marshall was in her sitting-room. Miss Dutton was there too, and Miss Cripps, but Nancy walked straight in, all the same.

"Oh, Miss Marshall," she began eagerly, "Grace belongs on the picnic with a gold star, and I belong at home with a red circle. I'm afraid there isn't time now to explain it all out to you, and still get Grace started with the rest. So may I just tell her that she's to go, and I'll explain it when you come home to-night?"

"Are you perfectly sure that you are right?" asked Miss Marshall very gravely.

"Yes, Miss Marshall," returned Nancy, with equal solemnity. It is no light matter to deprive oneself of a long anticipated May Day picnic.

"You are the only girl whom we must leave behind to-day, Nancy."

"Yes, Miss Marshall," said Nancy, blushing violently.

"Well, please go at once and tell Grace to come down," commanded Miss Marshall, a sudden smile lighting her grave face. "And Nancy—in view of the peculiar circumstances of the case, which you shall explain more fully to me later, I'm going to remit your special punishment. I'm going to put you on probation."

"Does that mean that I may go to-day?" demanded Nancy shyly.

"It does," smiled Miss Marshall. "That is, if you and Grace can catch the train. Now run!"

"I'm on probation," Nancy wrote in the Red Journal that night. "That means that I mustn't, just mustn't get another red circle—I'm in honor bound not to. If I do, I suppose I shall have to pay two penalties instead of one—one for to-day's circle, and one for the new one. I didn't like to ask about that, because it would have seemed as if I didn't intend to try. When you are on probation you have to try. You would be ashamed not to. There are six weeks more of this term, and if I get through them safely (without circles) I shall surprise myself, and I guess Miss Marshall. But I've got to do it. So prepare to be surprised, Nancy Lee!

"Resolved: never to tell anybody an improving

quotation (specially not Grace). Jeanne thinks that jokes are dangerous, but no joke could possibly make more trouble than that quotation has already ; and I foresee that there is worse to come. Grace is so thorough ! She never drops anything until she has finished it right up. If she doesn't have better luck finishing her investigation of friendship than she has so far, I shall be finished too.

" That sounds ungrateful, but it isn't. Only I'm beginning to understand what brother Dick means when he says ' Girls are so queer ! '

" We took Grace into the W. W.'s,—Jane and Christina were very nice about it. Grace acted to me a good deal as if she had expected us to do that very thing. Anyway she'll be surer than ever now that friendship is only a sordid exchange of favors.

" (I'm pretty proud of that last sentence, if I am on probation.)—N. Lee."

CHAPTER IX

THE HONOR OF FAIR OAKS

It was a gala afternoon at Fair Oaks School. Mrs. Grant—mother of the redoubtable Thomas, whose house-parties from Yale enlivened the town over the week-ends—had waxed enthusiastic about the picturesqueness of archery, as she had seen it practiced on the Fair Oaks campus. She had promptly organized a club among the town girls, and Miss MacPherson, who believed that nothing got the most and the best out of one, whether in work or play, like a spirit of wholesome rivalry, had picked a "Champion Fair Oaks Team" from among the devotees of archery, and suggested that they challenge the town girls to a tournament.

Afternoon study-hour had been shortened, in honor of the great occasion, and by three o'clock the campus swarmed with archers,—knots of the school or the town colors on their arms,—with schoolgirls, and with friends of the town girls, each of whom had been privileged to invite two guests.

"I certainly hope they'll have the sense to bring men," Kittie Westervelt had sighed; and

she was gratified by the appearance of a goodly number of the sterner sex, each one of whom speedily became the center of a bevy of admiring girls.

But the most popular man of them all was not the guest of any town girl. Dr. Jim had telephoned Plain Mary at lunch time from the Castle. His car was out of commission, he explained. He had therefore had to travel up by train, and he was reduced to the necessity of paying Mary a mere call.

"I suppose I may not even bring candy to be consumed within the sacred precincts. Shall I be welcome under all these trying circumstances?" he demanded humbly.

Plain Mary joyously assured him that he must come over as soon as possible to witness the tournament.

Vera was captain of the champion team, and Kittie was an usher, her chief duty being to keep the spectators at a proper distance from the archery field, for which purpose she carried a very ornamental staff, decked with the school colors and tipped like an arrow. So, of those who had been in Dr. Jim's motor-party, only Jane and Nancy were free to help Mary receive and entertain the Ogre,—with all the rest of Fair Oaks, however, ready to aid her at the slightest sign of encourage-

ment. Nothing can make a schoolgirl popular much faster than a good-looking guardian possessed of a big gray touring-car and a nice taste in candy and afternoon tea-cakes. But Plain Mary was oblivious to the significance of the smiles and cordial nods she received on all sides, and Dr. Jim seemed to agree with Mary that he had enough entertainers for the present. If he meant to make more friends, as he had hinted, at Fair Oaks, he was not in the mood to begin just yet.

"The Ogre is feeling rather ogre-ish to-day," said Jane, in an aside to Nancy, when, after a few minutes' talk indoors, Mary suggested the party's making a tour of the campus, and thus gave Jane and Mary a momentary chance for confidences.

"I hope the Princess isn't worse again," said Nancy anxiously. "He does certainly seem a lot solemner to-day, somehow."

But it wasn't the Princess's case that was making the Ogre seem solemn.

"Mrs. Barton sent you a message by Dr. Jim," Plain Mary told Nancy presently. "She said that it's to be the kitten's birthday to-morrow, and you and Lloyd and Sarah are invited to his party because you're friends of the kitten, and I'm invited too, because I'm a friend of Dr. Jim."

"I'm proud to have my friends classed with those of Prince Charming," laughed Dr. Jim.

Then he turned with his friendly smile to Nancy. "I've prescribed girls and good times for my patient. I hope you'll continue to lend me your valuable help toward seeing that she gets them."

"I'll try," promised Nancy eagerly. "I wish doctors would ever prescribe good times for me when I'm sick, instead of horrid-tasting medicines! But then I haven't been sick for perfect ages," ended Nancy rather ruefully.

Dr. Jim laughed with the rest at her absurd anti-climax; but presently the sober look crept back into his fine eyes, and little worried lines wrinkled his forehead. "It's generally easy enough to see what a patient needs," he said, "but there isn't always a supply of it over the garden fence, to be had for the asking. Mrs. Barton needs girls, and here you are. But the boy I was talking to this morning, in my office in Boston, needs rest and change and petting and freedom from worrying. And he might as well need the moon, poor fellow! By the way, when I mentioned that I was coming up here to-day, he said he had a relative in this school."

"A sister?" demanded Plain Mary. Dr. Jim thought not. "Any sister worth having would be at home helping a brother like that one by putting her shoulder to the wheel. It must have been a mere cousin."

"What was his last name?" asked Mary. "If it was the same as his cousin's ——"

"Curiously enough, I don't know his last name, Mary," explained Dr. Jim. "His own physician brought him in to see me, and after they'd left I realized that he'd called the boy Rob, and I'd called him Rob, and never even asked for any more name."

"Hasn't Vera Lawson a brother Rob?" asked Plain Mary.

"I never heard her speak of a brother," said Nancy.

"She acts to me like an only child," said Jane, whereat Dr. Jim laughed and said that he agreed with Jane, and that he was sure, anyhow, that his boy Rob was not the haughty Miss Lawson's brother.

And there the matter was dropped.

"The Ogre wants the moon to give to his sick friend," said Jane to Nancy, when they were together again. "That's why he's feeling ogre-ish."

"I wish we could help him to get it," said Nancy. "The sick friend must need it very badly, to worry a nice Ogre so."

"Well, I'm not worrying. I think he'll get the moon all right. When an Ogre knits his brows and cogitates, even the moon sits up and takes notice of his wants," declared Jane.

"I'm going to find Lloyd and Sarah and tell

them about the kitten's party," said Nancy. "I love to tell people about nice things like that."

"And I must go and chirk up Christina," put in Jane. "She's on the team to-day, you know, substituting for Blanche Atwood. I can't decide whether having me around to chirk her up makes Christina more nervous or less. So first I chirk a while, and then I depart a while, and then I vice versa—no, I mean I ditto."

Nancy found little Sarah down in the tangle of bushes by the lake, feeding nuts to Bob-tail and Chatterbox, and explaining to them in soothing tones that nobody wanted to shoot them with those horrid old arrows, and that they were to run and tell 'Fraid Cat and old Whiskers quick, this very minute, so they would understand too, and not be worried. Then they could all come back together for nuts. When Nancy appeared, Bob-tail and Chatterbox instantly obeyed the first part of Sarah's injunction, scampering off like mad and scolding as they went. Little Sarah smiled forgivingly at Nancy, who in her eyes could do no wrong, explained about the panic that was agitating the squirrel colony because of the tournament, and hugged Nancy appreciatively when Nancy, in her turn, explained about the Prince's birthday.

"Who told you?" she demanded.

"The Ogre—I mean Dr. James, Mary's guard-

ian," explained Nancy. "He had luncheon at Mrs. Barton's to-day."

"Why do you call him the Ogre?" demanded little Sarah inquisitively.

"I don't. I generally call him Dr. Jim, because he told us that all his other friends did, and we might too."

"But you said 'the Ogre,'" persisted Sarah.

"Oh, that is just a silly joke-name that Jane Learned gave him. You wouldn't understand about it."

"I understand all about ogres," said Sarah loftily, "'cause you told me your own self. But I didn't think Mary's guardian would be that kind of a person. He looks quite nice."

"He's very nice," said Nancy. "What kind of a party do you suppose the Prince will have?"

"I don't know, 'cept I'm going to take him a present from Annette," cried little Sarah, instantly forgetting the Ogre, and dancing up and down in her excitement. "The present's a catnip ball, and I bought it last week, to be sure to have it ready in time for his birthday. Is that Spoiled Kitten of yours going to send a present too?"

"Maybe," said Nancy mysteriously, "if she gets my letter in time to see about it. The tournament is beginning, Sarah. Don't you want to come and watch?"

But Sarah preferred the thicket and the squirrels to watching other girls shoot arrows.

"It's no fun just to look on at a game," she said. "I'll come, maybe, when I've fed them all the nuts I have in my pocket."

Lloyd Mallory took as little interest as Sarah in the archery contest, though her reasons were quite different.

"It seems silly to me," she told Nancy, when the two met on the edge of the crowd of spectators, "to spend your time learning to shoot with a bow, when it will never be of any possible use to you. If they were practicing with rifles or shotguns, there'd be some sense in it."

"Oh, can you shoot those things?" asked Nancy, in a rather terrified voice.

Lloyd nodded. "Not very well, but Pete says that I'm a fair shot for a beginner."

"I shouldn't be standing around here if that sort of shooting was going on," said Nancy positively. "Archery is just a game, Lloyd, and games aren't supposed to be any use. Don't you like to watch a pretty, graceful sport like this? Isn't Vera Lawson a regular queen to-day? She had that green suit made on purpose for archery. It's Lincoln green—the color that Robin Hood and his men used to wear in Sherwood forest."

"Is it?" Lloyd's face lighted with sudden

interest, for she loved the old tales and ballads of Robin and his crew. "I wish I cared more for games," she told Nancy wistfully. "I suppose it was because I never knew any other children when I was little that I never really learned to play."

"You're not too old to begin now," laughed Nancy. "You must make the most of all your chances, beginning with to-morrow, when Prince Charming has a party." And Nancy explained how the Princess had taken up little Sarah's suggestion about Prince Charming's birthday.

"What fun!" cried Lloyd. "Birthdays are another thing that I don't seem to know much about. I used to have parties when I was a little thing, but I never knew that grown-ups bothered about birthdays, as the girls do here."

"Grown-ups, and now even kittens," laughed Nancy. "When is your birthday, Lloyd?"

"The second of June," Lloyd told her, and then the two girls separated, Nancy, who was anxious to know how the tournament was progressing, making a slow way through the crowd to a place near the score-sheet, and Lloyd climbing up to the deserted seat in the Crooked Elm, whence she could look down on the gay scene below her, and think happily of Nancy's friendly talk and of the fun in store for her to-morrow.

Lloyd could not tell fairy-tales like the ones Nancy invented so easily for the delectation of little Sarah ; indeed she thought fairy-tales rather silly. But she loved to sit and dream stories quite as marvelous, though of another sort: stories in which she was always the heroine, shy no longer, no longer awkward, above all no longer "queer." She was comical and clever like Jane, little and clinging like Christina, as popular and as gay as merry Nancy Lee. In this delightful guise she went, from her perch in the Crooked Elm, to the Prince's birthday celebration, and was the life of the party. In her lovely dream-story, she was Nancy's best chum. She was the new captain of the archery team. She was that pretty town girl, with all the boys crowding around her. A happy smile lit Lloyd's quiet face and brightened her dark eyes. There are more ways than one of having "the time of your gay young life," as Jane always phrased it, at an archery tournament.

Meanwhile, Nancy, slipping deftly through the crowd, gained the front rank near the score-sheet, which was fastened, rustic-fashion, to the trunk of a big tree. It was evident that a serious discussion was going forward among the managers of the tournament. Mrs. Grant who was chaperoning the town team, Miss MacPherson, Vera Lawson, the town girls' captain, half a dozen other archers,

and an usher or two, stood in front of the sheet, engaged in earnest conversation.

"What's the matter?" asked Nancy, finding herself beside Jeanne Durand.

"Ah, I can tell you," said Jeanne gaily, "instead of asking you, as always before, in my foreign ignorance. Mademoiselle Christina has just told me, so: the two sides they shoot once, and they are even; twice they shoot, and they are even; three times, and it is the same. There is now not much more time. Everybody say, 'Who will win?' So now they must decide how they shall arrange it. Miss Christina think the two captains,—Vera and the very tall young lady in white,—shall now try, and that decides for all."

"Oh, I see!" Nancy looked carefully at the scores. "Yes, they're even after all this time. How queer!"

"Ma'mselle Christina say they do not measure the shots with enough pains, counting every little inch. They count only by the colors of the target," explained Jeanne eagerly.

Just then the group before the score-sheet dissolved, and Kittie Westervelt and another usher bore down upon the crowding spectators.

"Stand back, please," commanded Kittie importantly. "The match is now to be decided by a round of three shots each between the cap-

tains. Keep back of the chalk-line on the grass, please."

Holding hands and being careful not to lose their front-row places, Jeanne and Nancy backed slowly to the chalk-line that Kittie had indicated —one of two parallel lines that marked off a long, narrow grass-plot in front of the target. Jeanne and Nancy were at the upper end of the space, nearer the target than anybody but Miss MacPherson and Mrs. Grant, who were umpiring the match.

"I do hope we can beat them," said Nancy, as the town-girl, winning the toss, chose to let Vera shoot first.

"I think we do. Vera is not—what you say —never to be 'rattle.' She is cool as ice always."

"Yes, and she's practiced a lot," said Nancy hopefully.

A hush fell on the crowd, as Vera fitted her arrow, took slow, careful aim, and let fly. Hardly had her shaft hit the red circle next to the bull's-eye, when the town team's captain lifted her bow and with a swift, careless gesture shot her arrow. It, too, stuck in the red circle, a shade nearer the inner edge than Vera's.

"How funny!" said Nancy. "She didn't seem to aim at all."

"SHE'S PRACTISED A LOT"

"It is always so. You have not watched, perhaps?" questioned Jeanne. "She has been a fine shot each time, and never has she waited to aim. She mus' be—what you say?—a natural-born shooter."

Vera's next arrow hit the bull's-eye, while the town captain's casual shot struck just on the inner rim of the red.

The spectators were now tense and quiet with excitement. A pink flush of triumph tinted Vera's soft cheeks, and the town-girl, who was a point behind, drummed nervously on her bow, as she waited for Vera to aim.

"One moment, please!" cried Miss MacPherson. Vera lowered her bow in surprise, and waited. The spectators began to chatter again. It was some question about counting the points that must be decided before the final round, so the girl next Nancy told her. Miss MacPherson, Mrs. Grant, and the captains conversed animatedly. The ushers walked back and forth, keeping the field clear. Jane Learned started a cheer for "Fair Oaks and Fair Oaks' Vera." The town-girls' masculine guests gathered in a knot and cheered their captain. Nobody but the umpires, the ushers, and eager little Jeanne Durand noticed that the captains had stepped quickly back to their places, and that Vera was again taking aim.

"Look!" whispered Jeanne to Nancy. "Her arrow it is painted with the town colors."

"Sh!" whispered Nancy. "She's picked up the wrong one, but it won't matter."

Less deliberately than before, Vera sighted and shot. Instantly the town-girl's arrow flew after Vera's, so that the two were in the air together. Then, with a nervous shrug that seemed to say, "It's all over now," the town-girl turned her back on the target and melted into a group of friends behind her, leaving Vera standing alone by the basket of arrows.

"Why, they've shot!"

"They've both used town arrows!"

"Which is which?"

"Who wins?"

There was a babel of questions and exclamations, as the crowd surged forward over the course.

"Mine is the arrow in the bull's-eye, I believe," said Vera, walking calmly toward the target.

"Hurrah for Fair Oaks' Vera!" shrieked the girls nearest her, who had heard what she said, and the crowd took up the cry, "Fair Oaks! Fair Oaks! Vera Lawson!"

Meanwhile an usher wormed her difficult way through the crowd. "The captains are wanted in front," she explained. "Tell the town captain that the umpires want her—at once, please."

Meanwhile Nancy and Jeanne, still hand in hand, wriggled determinedly ahead. "It is all one big mistake," Jeanne whispered sadly to Nancy. "Miss MacPherson will so explain, and we will be on the scene to console with Vera."

"Who made the mistake?" wondered Nancy. "It's too bad. I'm awfully sorry for Vera. Losing seems a lot worse, some way, after you've been sure that you've won."

Vera had reached the umpires now, with Nancy and Jeanne just behind her.

"This match seems ill-fated, Miss Lawson," Miss MacPherson was explaining. "A sudden shaft of sunlight dazzled both Mrs. Grant and me, and with the two arrows of the same color flying practically at once, we are not sure which one is yours. Do you know?"

"Mine is the one in the bull's-eye, I think, Miss MacPherson," repeated Vera calmly.

"Do you agree, Janet?" asked Mrs. Grant of the tall town captain, who was listening over Vera's shoulder.

The tall girl put out her hand to Vera. "Shake," she said good-naturedly. "I turned my back on that last shot, so it's lucky you saw. Anyhow, our arrow won, if we didn't."

There was a sudden stir in the crowd, as eager, impulsive little Jeanne pushed past two girls, who

stared at her angrily, to lay a hand on Vera's arm.

"Oh, Vera, you are mistake! You shoot the torn arrow. See!" Jeanne ran forward and pointed at a tiny splinter on the arrow that had stuck in the outer circle of white. "I see that—what you say?—ragged place, as you aim."

With a look of annoyed surprise on her plump, open countenance, Miss MacPherson dropped the crayon with which she had been about to record the final scores, and looked questioningly from Jeanne to Vera.

Still smiling her cool little smile and quite ignoring Jeanne's pleading eyes, Vera turned to Mrs. Grant. "I may have been mistaken, of course," she said. "Shall we shoot again or call the match a tie?"

Mrs. Grant admired Vera Lawson tremendously because her idolized son Thomas did. "Your friend is just as likely to be wrong as you, my dear," she said sweetly. "It's lovely of you to give up like this, but——"

"Did any one else follow the arrows?" asked Miss MacPherson sharply.

"Oh, yes!" began Jeanne, and stopped, realizing that Nancy, not she, was the one to speak now. There was a long pause.

"I did, Miss MacPherson, and I agree with Jeanne."

Nancy hated to speak out like that in public. She dreaded to meet the disappointed looks of her schoolmates. Most of all she shrank from Vera's annoyance. Vera was so sweet and so pretty. She had appreciated Nancy's help about separating Jeanne and Jane, and been very nice to Nancy in consequence. But Nancy had seen the arrows distinctly, and she knew that Vera was wrong. The honor of Fair Oaks demanded that Jeanne's statement be corroborated.

"Any one else?" asked Miss MacPherson, who was plainly much annoyed by the whole episode.

But no one else had seen the last shot—or at least no one else cared to give an opinion about it.

Miss MacPherson consulted for a moment with Mrs. Grant. Then, erasing the captain's individual scores, she wrote "Tie" below the team records.

"I really think the town should be scheduled winners," she explained to the crowd, "but Mrs. Grant is dead against that. So this is the umpires' compromise,—with profound apologies for having been dazzled by the sun."

"And the town team challenges yours to another match on our grounds next week," added Mrs. Grant, with a consolatory smile for Vera.

Vera accepted the challenge charmingly, in the

name of her team. She was so sweet and apologetic over the afternoon's misadventures—so sorry about having used the wrong arrow, about her mistake, and the failure of her team to win.

Escorted by a troop of her admirers and most of the male guests, she made a triumphal progress to the boat-house, where there ensued a lively contest for the privilege of taking her canoeing, as the best way of reviving her becomingly drooping spirits. The other Fair Oaks girls did not go out in the canoes; they politely insisted that their visitors take the boats, which they could use at any other time. But Vera Lawson, in the best canoe, with three cushions at her back and two cavaliers at her feet, spent the end of the hot afternoon drifting pleasantly under the shade of the overhanging willows at the farthest end of the lake. And nobody, not even the girls whose cavaliers she had summarily appropriated, seemed to think the worse of Vera. No wonder that she was badly spoiled; no wonder that she took unusual liberties; no wonder that even independent Jane Learned hesitated a little before attacking the manners or motives of the school idol.

"I suppose I'm a peanut," Jane said to Nancy, as the girls trooped in to dinner that evening, "but I can't help wondering why the great Vera picked up a town arrow at the critical point in this after-

noon's match. There's a reason for everything, you know, N. Lee."

Nancy cast a scared look at Jane. "I—I wondered too," she confessed shamefacedly.

"Of course," said Jane, "if she intended to shoot when no one was noticing and then claim the best shot, why, mixing the arrows ——"

"Would help," concluded Nancy, after a pause. "Oh, Jane, I'm afraid we're being very horrid."

Jane grinned. "We can't help our thoughts—at least the Fault Factory doesn't guarantee to improve those much. But we can help talking things over, and we'd probably better. For even if the worst is true, it doesn't give us any new light on the subject of Vera. We knew long ago that she isn't quite square. And whether the worst is true or not, do you know, I'm sorry for her."

"Why, so am I, Jane!" chimed in Nancy in quick surprise. "Isn't it queer that we both should have thought of that—to-day too, when she was having such a grand time?"

Jane nodded. "She always manages to have what you call grand times, N. Lee; but think how she works for them! Why, I wouldn't fag my brain overtime, as she does, thinking how to work people, and how to hold the center of the stage, and all that—not for all the social positions in creation," declared Jane vehemently.

"Neither would I," echoed Nancy. "And so let's just be sorry for her, and say nothing about our mean suspicions, and hope others will act the same. Oh, I do hope they will!" added Nancy Lee, so earnestly that little Christina, coming up just then, inquired anxiously if somebody had flunked algebra.

CHAPTER X

NOT WANTED

PRINCE CHARMING'S birthday party was elaborate and original enough to satisfy even critical little Sarah Williston, connoisseur in the matter of feline festivities.

"The preparations were so entertaining that I had to stay over," explained Dr. Jim, coming in with the Princess to greet the Fair Oaks guests.

"Have you a present?" asked little Sarah, displaying her catnip ball tied up in alluring scarlet paper.

Dr. Jim assumed great distress. "Why didn't somebody tell me sooner that I ought to get one?"

"Oh, it's not necessary," explained Sarah politely. "Only at your birthday parties most people do bring you a present, you know."

"But I haven't had a birthday party for ages and ages and ages," explained Dr. Jim solemnly. "So I didn't know. I'll bring the Prince a present the very next time I come, to make up."

Nancy had brought a picture post-card of a kitten named Snow-White, to decorate the side of the

Prince's basket. Plain Mary had brought a celluloid ball, and Lloyd, like Dr. Jim, had not thought to bring anything.

"You don't know how much better I feel now," said the Ogre, smiling at the shy, wistful-eyed girl so winningly that in half a minute he had added one to his list of Fair Oaks friends.

"John, will you put all these lovely presents with the rest of the party?" said Mrs. Barton to the stately old butler, who went off carrying the ball, the picture post-card and the scarlet bundle as carefully as if they had been fragile family heirlooms.

Prince Charming was in his basket in the library. He blinked and stretched so sleepily when little Sarah hugged him, that Mrs. Barton asked Sarah to take him and get him into a proper party-mood.

"When you've waked him up, come and tell us," said Mrs. Barton, giving her littlest "real girl" a kiss.

She was a very gay Princess to-day. "Come and see my flowers," she begged the older girls. "I've got the loveliest carved stone seat in my garden, that Dr. Jim sent up to me from Boston, where I can sit and watch the daffodils growing, after I've gotten tired walking about looking for the beginnings of rosebuds. Oh, and you must

see the lilies-of-the-valley! They and the violets will be blossoming out next."

The Princess's garden was a wonderful place. There were tall trees and great spreading shrubs in it, as well as the smaller plants. There was a spring garden, a summer rose garden, and a fall garden, a formal garden set in clipped hedges, a wild garden tucked away in the shrubbery, and a water garden down at the foot of the hill near the lake shore. The Princess joyously showed it all to her "real girls." She agreed with Lloyd that the wild garden was the loveliest—almost! She exclaimed with Nancy over the "beginnings" of rosebuds, and sympathized with Plain Mary's raptures over a flaunting bed of "parrot" tulips. Finally she led them proudly to the new stone seat.

"Why, it doesn't look so very new!" said Plain Mary, looking searchingly at Dr. Jim. Mary was wondering why, if her guardian had been going to give such a shabby stone seat to Mrs. Barton, he hadn't had it carefully washed first. It was certainly a very dingy present to give to a Princess, Mary thought. Or had the Princess treated Dr. Jim's gift carelessly since she received it?

But the Princess and Dr. Jim seemed to find Mary's suggestion very amusing. "No, it looks

quite delightfully old, my dear," said the Princess. "Almost as old as the big elm tree that shelters it, and quite as if it had grown here, like the elm and the yew hedge and the daffodils."

"It used to be in a French Marquise's garden, Mary," added Dr. Jim kindly. "So it really is about the same age as the elm. It's a very comfortable old seat. Try it."

Just at this point little Sarah came hopping out to say that Prince Charming was now the friskiest little kitten that ever had had a birthday party. So they all went back to the library, where the Princess, a little tired with so much unwonted excitement, snuggled down in a big easy chair, and asked Nancy to ring for the "party" to be brought in.

The "party," held high in the hands of the old butler, was a huge white cake, with plain frosted sides, and a fancy frosted top beautifully trimmed with little pink roses and with one tall pink candle burning in the middle of it.

"Oh, what a splendid big cake!" said little Sarah, who was sitting on the floor holding Prince Charming. "Only—does he just love to eat cake, Mrs. Barton? Annette never did, you see."

"I think he's going to 'just love' this cake," laughed the Princess. "Put it on the floor in front of Miss Sarah, John."

The next minute the Princess was down on the floor too, and so were all the rest of the guests, except Dr. Jim, who was rather too tall to sit on the floor comfortably.

"I think you'll have to blow out his one-year-old candle for him, perhaps," the Princess told Sarah.

Sarah leaned forward to blow, and that brought Prince Charming's inquisitive little nose nearer his cake. With a plaintive mew and a determined wriggle Prince Charming was out of Sarah's arms, sniffing at his birthday party in a frantic fashion that said, as distinctly as if he had spoken, "Where, where, where are those clams that smell so fascinating? I can't find them, and I must find them —right away, this very minute!"

"Why, the top's not frosting at all! It's just paper!" cried little Sarah, and at that very moment Prince Charming put two little black paws on the paper-frosting and down he went, crash into the middle of his lovely cake.

"I think perhaps you'll have to pull away the torn paper for him," laughed the Princess, "and then it's such a very big box that there will be plenty of room for him to sit down and enjoy his party."

When the crumpled paper was pulled away, there was left in the box, that had looked just like

a big cake, Prince Charming, a nice little saucer of steamed clams, a bowl of thick cream, a beautiful red neck-bow, and the presents that Sarah, Mary, and Nancy had brought. There was no question which of his birthday gifts the Prince preferred; before the paper frosting was pulled away, he had begun gobbling up clams, and he continued to gobble till the last, least speck of clam had vanished. Then he turned his attention to cream.

"Annette had a Christmas tree once, hung with oysters," said little Sarah, tying on the Prince's new neck-bow, after he had wiped his face neatly with his paw, "and that was nice; but this is nicer. It was so very astonishing to see a cake turn into a box. And besides the Christmas tree tickled poor Annette's face, so she couldn't thoroughly enjoy her oysters. Yes, I think this is the very nicest party a kitten ever could have. Mrs. Barton, does Dr. Jim think you may have the fairy party, too, before very terribly long?"

"She may have it quite terribly soon," said Dr. Jim solemnly, "provided, that is, that I'm invited."

There was chocolate ice-cream and real little cakes with real frosting on them, for Prince Charming's guests. When they left, the Princess filled their hands with golden daffodils, which, as

they walked through the school campus, brought all their friends flocking to admire the flowers and to hear about the wonderful birthday party.

Margaret Lewis, coming back from a tennis match, linked arms with Nancy, and drew her a little away from the others.

"I'm on the Red Crew," she whispered happily. "I'm one of Billy's Invincibles. Are you on, too, Nancy?"

Nancy gave a little start of surprise. "I haven't been told so yet, anyhow. But I've been away all this afternoon. Do you suppose ——"

"Billy came over to the dormitory at four to tell me," Margaret explained, "so probably she just missed you. Let's hope so, anyhow."

"I'm glad you're on, Margaret," said Nancy absently. She was trying to think how she could arrange a casual meeting with Billy before dinner. She really couldn't wait until after that long meal to know her fate.

"Oh, Nancy! Margaret!" called somebody behind them. It was Mildred Wallace, hurrying up from the boat-house. "I want to tell you something," she panted, when she had caught up with them. "I'm on the crew! Billy's just taken me down to fit me out with oars."

Over Mildred's sandy head Margaret shot a quick glance of sympathy at Nancy. There were only

two vacant places in the Invincibles' boat. Nancy stopped planning how to contrive a meeting with Billy, and devoted her attention to saying the proper things to Mildred.

"Oh, I'm so happy!" Mildred answered their congratulations. "I was homesick for the baby when I first came back this term, and then I felt rather left out when you were all talking so much about riding lessons. But in the end none of my best friends took the lessons, and now I'm an Invincible. Isn't it splendid? I'm sorry you're not on too, Nancy."

"The boat won't hold everybody, you see," said Nancy with a sorry little smile, and hurried on alone to the dormitory. As she dressed for dinner, her bright face set in hard, resentful lines.

"I know I row better than Mildred. I know I do," she kept thinking over and over. "It's not fair. I know I row better."

Wishing to avoid conversation about the crew, Nancy waited till the last minute before going down-stairs to dinner,—and ran straight into the person she most desired to escape, in the lower hall.

"Hello!" said Billy Bray cordially. "Are you almost late too? I want to thank you for practicing with the Reds, Nancy, and to say that I'm sorry ——"

"Oh, that's all right," cut in Nancy with forced gaiety. "Of course I'm a good deal more sorry."

"Well, I was sure you wouldn't act heart-broken and weepy about it," laughed Billy, "like some former candidates who haven't quite made good." And with that they joined the procession into the dining-room.

"I won't show that I care! I'll be a good loser, at least," Nancy promised herself. So she spread the good news of Margaret's and Mildred's honors, repeating, when tactless friends condoled with her over her own disappointment, her useful joke that unfortunately the Invincibles' boat wouldn't hold everybody.

But up-stairs in the Unmixed Study, with only the other Trianglers to know, Nancy threw pride to the winds and wept bitter tears on Christina's best couch pillow.

"I wanted so to be on that crew," she sobbed. "I never wanted anything so much. And then, it's not fair! I row better than Mildred Wallace. I don't understand it. I thought Billy liked me. I shouldn't care so much, only it's not fair."

"Billy rooms with Vera," mused Jane. "In spite of her athletics and her general all-around good sense, Billy's a Vera-ite. And yesterday, by siding with Jeanne, you hurt Vera's pride. Also, you sided with the Terrible Twins about the riding

business, and Vera's select class in horsemanship is a good deal more select than Vera intended. Maybe Vera dropped Billy a hint."

"But Nancy dear, didn't you cut practice a lot?" suggested Christina practically.

"Well, of course you can't go every single time," Nancy parried. "It's not expected. No, Jane's right. It's just a piece of meanness. Maybe Billy didn't intend to be unfair, but she was certainly influenced by Vera."

As they undressed that night Nancy told Grace all about her troubles. She did not intend to spread an unpleasant story about Billy, but the rank injustice she believed herself to have suffered was the sort of experience, she knew, that Grace would understand and be sympathetic about. Nancy felt that she must confide in somebody besides the light-hearted, irresponsible twins, who took no disappointment seriously,—not even the loss, more agonizing because wholly undeserved, of a place on the Red Crew. Grace was serious-minded; she would appreciate Nancy's sorrow. Grace was sensitive of injustice; she would abhor Billy's unfairness, and understand the bitterness that tinged Nancy's present outlook upon life.

To Nancy's amazement and disgust, Grace was distinctly incredulous of Billy's unfairness.

"You didn't go to practice, Nancy," she repeated

inexorably. "I told you you'd have to be more regular. I warned you that showing yourself reliable and learning to row with the rest were very important things."

"I was as regular as ——"

"Not as Margaret or Mildred," interrupted Grace. "Mildred never lost a single day."

"I don't care. She can't row. She doesn't belong on the Red Crew. It's not fair or just. Billy left me out because Vera said to."

"But Nancy ——" Grace started to answer, then fell silent.

Nancy cried herself to sleep long before the clock struck eleven, but Grace lay for hours tossing and turning, thinking and thinking and thinking. Nancy mustn't get into the way of being suspicious and sensitive, of imagining that people were against her. Grace felt sure that Nancy was wrong about Billy's motive; and she couldn't bear to feel that her influence, perhaps, had led her sunny roommate to adopt a theory so uncharacteristic. Were her own ideas that some one had slighted her, Grace wondered, ever as absurd as this belief of Nancy's that Billy and Vera Lawson had not wanted her on the crew? It was staying away from practice that had kept Nancy off, of course. But Nancy couldn't see it.

"I wonder if I reason the same silly way when

I'm sure the twins have snubbed me on purpose," Grace mused. "Well, anyhow I mustn't let Nancy catch my silliness and be made unhappy by it."

In her absorption with this chain of reasoning, Grace had forgotten all about the proverb that urged her to make friends by being one; but she carried out the real spirit of it none the less, when, after Nancy had sulked gloomily for three days, assured that all the world, and especially her roommate, was against her, Grace went straight to Billy Bray with her difficulties.

And Billy, who had a warm heart under her brusque manner, and a clear head, as well as strong arms, understood and in her turn went straight to Nancy.

"I say, little girl," she began pleasantly, ignoring Nancy's haughty aloofness, "it's a lot better to discuss things right out than to juggle them round inside your head till it aches and you can't think straight. I'm worried about something, and I want to tell you."

"It's coming!" thought Nancy triumphantly. "She was influenced by Vera, and now she's ashamed of it."

But that wasn't at all what had worried Billy. "I didn't understand you," Billy explained repentantly. "I've noticed that girls who are al-

ways laughing, like you and me, Nancy, are pretty often misunderstood. People think we don't care about things—aren't keen to win out, you know, and heart-broken if, for any reason, we don't do our best. Well, I thought you didn't care about the Red Crew—that, when you cut practice so much, you'd lost your interest. So I didn't go to you and warn you that you must be more regular, as I ought to have done, and as I should have done if you didn't smile so much, and if there wasn't a dance in your walk, Nancy Lee. But you haven't smiled or danced very much since the crew appointments were announced, and so I've come to say I'm sorry, Nancy. We wanted you in the good ship 'Invincible.' We wanted you hard."

You couldn't doubt Billy's word. Her honest brown eyes looked straight out at the world, and her account of herself rang true. Nancy held out her hand.

"You're a brick, Billy dear, to come and tell me not to be cross. I shall be sorrier than ever now that you aren't my captain, but—I understand. I counted up the practices I'd missed today, when I ought to have been doing algebra, and there were a lot—more than I ever dreamed. So I was beginning to understand before you came. And—thank you," ended Nancy, with a

funny muddle of tears and laughter in her eyes and her voice.

It was very easy making explanations to the twins. Jane said she was sorry that she'd been "such a mean suspicious old cat," and Christina tactfully refrained from saying, "I told you so." So did Grace, when Nancy, after a short, sharp struggle with her pride, and a resolution to receive Grace's "I told you so" in good part, since it was well deserved, told her roommate about the astonishing interview with Billy.

"I love what Billy said about discussing things," Grace remarked, instead of saying what Nancy had expected. "I believe that a good many hurt feelings are just nonsense."

"I'm sure of it," laughed Nancy. "That is," she added hastily, remembering that Grace's feelings were very sensitive to uncomplimentary allusions, "I don't know much about it, I guess. My feelings are pretty tough generally; I like people, and I expect them to like me. It's a lot more fun than the other way, and I hope I shan't be such a silly soon again."

"I hope you won't be so unhappy soon again," said Grace with an adoring "all or nothing" glance that was quite lost on Nancy.

That young woman sighed plaintively. "As long as I'm such a forgetful scatter-brain, I

mustn't expect to be chosen for nice things like Junior Houses and Red Crews. Oh, dear! Well, at least I haven't had an untidiness circle so far."

"I've adopted a motto," Nancy confided that night to the Red Journal. "Margaret suggested it: 'Do what you set out to.' It ends in a preposition, which isn't the best English usage, and it's not by any great author; so I hope it won't be as troublesome as the one Grace had. (She hasn't mentioned friendship lately, so I'm hoping my troubles with that are over.) Margaret says that my motto has worked well for her, but Margaret is the kind who can manage any motto. I didn't tell her that I was going to adopt her motto, because if it turns out badly for me I'd rather not have her know and want to laugh, only she's too sweet to do it.

"Of course, the principal thing I can 'set out to do' at present is not to get red circles. It's too late to set out to make the Invincibles this year, and after Billy leaves in June it won't be the same. But I can 'set out to do' little things like learning to say *malheuresement* properly. Jeanne says that when you can pronounce *malheuresement*, you will have a good French accent, and Mademoiselle thinks that perhaps Jeanne is right.

"And another thing I shall 'set out to do' (only it won't take much trying) is to enjoy every

minute of our bungalow house-party, that comes next Friday. Miss Cripps and Miss Dutton are the guests of honor, and Margaret and the twins and Plain Mary and Lloyd are going too. I'm so glad I drew lots to go with them, and to go the very first time the house is used for overnight, when the pots and pans are perfectly new and shiny, and the ferns in the wood are uncurling, and the leaves on the trees are new and little and softy green.

"(You'd better stop, N. Lee, or you'll be trying to write a spring poem in a minute, and then how silly you'll feel!)"

CHAPTER XI

LOST ON LITTLE BUBBLE

"KITTIE's chairman of to-day's expedition. Let's put the Fault Factory to work on her well-known tendency to shirk and then pretend to herself that she's done it all."

It was Friday noon, and the envied members of the first bungalow-party, released from afternoon study-hour, were arraying themselves in their official outing costumes and incidentally packing their official linen knapsacks. In ten minutes the dining-room would be cleared after luncheon, and Mary Ann would summon them to the assistance of their chairman in selecting and packing the raw materials for three regular meals and one tea.

Oddly enough the tea was Jane's idea. "They always have it at house-parties," she had explained. "I mean the house-parties you read about in novels. And if we eat Saturday's lunch rather early we can easily be hungry again before we have to start for our train."

"We shall want to go on a last lovely walk that

afternoon," put in Margaret, "and walking always makes you hungry."

So tea was decided upon. Jane saw to it that a plentiful supply of her favorite apricot jam was included, and three kinds of crackers.

"How can we get the Factory to work, Jane?" demanded Nancy eagerly, when Jane, half-dressed, darted across the hall with her interesting suggestion about Kittie.

"Oh, I don't know," said Jane, wriggling into her jumper. "Just firmly insist that she shan't fade away before everything is finished. About the time the last things—the ones that won't fit into any of the boxes—are left to be tackled, K. Westervelt will say, 'Now, girls, just finish up, while I—bathe my aching head in cool water,' or some such nonsense. Well, at this point or a little sooner, we politely but firmly intervene. And if there's any fading away, it mustn't be done by Kittie."

"I see." Nancy's face wore an earnest, thoughtful expression. She had taken Jane's Fault Factory very seriously. "Vanity is really Kittie's worst fault, I think. That's the one we ought to cure."

"Well, thinking you've done it all when you haven't is vanity; and so is snobbishness, which is another way Kittie has of overvaluing herself

compared to others. What are you so solemncholy for, N. Lee?"

Nancy laughed. "I'm sure I don't know. It's all a joke, isn't it? Kittie deserves to be joked about getting out of things—except fagging for Vera—and if she should improve, why, we'd ——"

"Have benefited humanity once more, according to our usual helpful custom," added Jane gaily. "We ought to give some attention to Plain Mary, too, while the F. F. is keyed up for action. She's been rather relaxing her frantic efforts to be a sylph, and since I've seen the Ogre I'm as anxious as Plain Mary ever was to have his ward please him by becoming as slender and charming as—untoward circumstances concerning Plain Mary's naturally dumpy figure will permit."

"That's easy to manage. We'll take her on very long, fast walks," said Nancy. "Dear me! How exciting our house-party is going to be!"

Jane reminded Nancy of that prophetic remark later; but at the moment she retorted scornfully that excitements connected with the silliness of Kittie Westervelt and the stoutness of Plain Mary were nothing much, especially when you had to make them all up yourself.

"I like excitements to drop down on me out of a clear sky," said Jane.

"If they're the nice kind," amended Nancy,

"like the youngness and amusingness of the Ogre."

"Naturally there are excitements and excitements," admitted Jane wisely. "But to my mind almost any is better than none at all. And now, as Mary Ann is waving us onward from the stairway, let us depart to business. And, remembering that what has never been done before may be done again, let us conspire to elevate the character of K. Westervelt. Christina darling, stop trying to make your hair curl down over your ears, and come along. We've got plans that will make the latest fashion in hair-dressing look like thirty cents."

Kittie Westervelt was much elated over the fact that the chairmanship of the first bungalow-party had fallen by lot to her. Kittie loved positions of authority; she was sure that no girl in the party was quite so well suited as herself to play the rôle of hostess-in-chief to Miss Cripps and Miss Dutton. Down in the dining-room, amid the bustle of culinary preparation, Kittie flitted about, suggesting here, interrupting there, and repeating at frequent intervals, in a manner carefully copied from Miss Marshall's, "How capable you all are, girls! I shall tell everybody what a splendid committee I had."

Strange to say, the competent committee could

not seem to advance its work beyond a certain point—the point where, as Jane described it, "the most is behind, but the worst is to come." Train-time approached, and the packing dragged inexplicably. Christina cut her finger microscopically, and had to retire from the fray. Jane, after delaying everybody with detailed accounts of Christina's youthful aversion to the sight of blood, also retired, to offer assistance and sympathy to Christina. Nancy Lee remembered that she had forgotten to pack her tooth-brush. Margaret Lewis and Lloyd Mallory assisted one another elaborately to tie up a small package, fastening it as securely as if it were bound for the North Pole by parcel post. Then, murmuring something about sticky fingers, they too disappeared, leaving Kittie in solitary contemplation of a table strewn with embarrassing odds and ends—lemons and oranges dropping out of two broken bags, a loaf of Cook's famous raisin bread, three cups, to replace some broken in the transit of the china to "Seldom Inn," a bowl of mayonnaise, and a bottle of cream, minus its pasteboard cover.

Fifteen minutes to train-time! Swiftly Kittie's dainty, patronizing manner slipped from her, to be displaced by sighing, despairing anger. She started toward the stairs, to call back her missing aids. How long did it take to pack a tooth-brush, or

to wash one's hands? Christina's cut finger was nothing. Jane went off just to bother. At that thought Kittie's wrath lost its supine desperation and suddenly acquired backbone. A winter at Fair Oaks had not been wholly without its effect on Kittie's under-developed common sense.

"I won't go for them! I won't give them that satisfaction!" she resolved sternly, and poured the lemons into a tin pail. Resolutely she hunted the cream cover; she wrapped the bread up once before she remembered that she should have put oiled paper around it first. Everything had been disposed of but the mayonnaise, when the dining-room door swung open, and Nancy Lee burst breathlessly in.

"All done?" she asked.

"Oh, it was practically finished when I left," cried Jane, rushing up behind Nancy.

"There was nothing much to do in the first place," chimed in Christina, at a nudge from her twin. "Now that supplies of all the staples are out at 'Seldom Inn,' it's really very simple to get the food ready."

"You'd better run for your hat," Margaret told the flushed, bewildered Kittie. "We'll clear away the muss."

"The mayonnaise ——" began Kittie faintly.

"I'll carry that just as it is, in the bowl," of-

fered Lloyd, rather guilty at having taken any part in Jane's conspiracy. "I can slip it right inside this bag. I brought down your hat and other things, Kittie."

"Thank you very much, Lloyd," said Kittie, with a ring of heartfelt gratitude in her weary voice that caused watchful Jane to nod approvingly at Nancy.

"She's made a grand start. We'll see that she draws the dinner-dishes to wash to-night, as her share of the house-party work. We shall make a woman of her yet, N. Lee."

Kittie did "draw" the dish-washing, and she bore the infliction with an injured air that deepened in intensity as she proceeded from glass and silver to pots and kettles and pans. But she made no articulate protest.

"And so she shall have a peaceful day to-morrow as her reward," said Jane. "Besides, we shan't have time for her to-morrow. It's Mary's turn."

The "Seldom Inn" house-party spent all that was left of Friday afternoon in the woods.

"It's certainly a magic grove," Lloyd confided to Nancy. "Every time we come it looks entirely different, and lovelier each time. To-day it's fairly carpeted with violets."

"I must have the scene of my next story for Sarah in a magic wood," declared Nancy. "Can't

we make our dinner-table adorable to-night, with all these flowers?"

"I like them best growing," said Lloyd. "I must plan our violet beds to-day." And that was the last her friends saw of Lloyd Mallory until dinner-time, when Miss Dutton caught her, with leaf-mould in her hair and her arms full of violet plants, and explained in her sweet little way that she too loved gardening and would go with Lloyd, if she might, to hunt violets, or whatever Lloyd had planned to get, to-morrow.

"You see, so many things might happen to one girl all alone by herself," explained Miss Dutton with her friendly smile.

Lloyd liked Miss Dutton too well to argue the point by bringing up some of her Western experiences. It was an absurd idea, of course, like most phases of this incomprehensible chaperoning; but at least Miss Dutton wouldn't chatter, as Kittie did, or the talkative twins, and so scatter all the wood-magic. So Lloyd yielded up her beloved solitude, and she and Miss Dutton went off by themselves next day in pursuit of adder's-tongue and Solomon's-seal, instead of joining the rest of the party in an exploring trip up the Smallest Bubble.

Just as the girls were starting off for the bungalow, Miss Marshall had handed Margaret a folded

paper which, she explained, was a trail-map of the country near "Seldom Inn."

"There's quite a summer colony at Bubble Lake," she explained, "though I did manage to build 'Seldom Inn' in a solitary-looking spot. And at Coronet Lake and Shadow, up the valley, there are more cottages. They're beginning a system of wood-paths from one lake to another and up all the hills. Don't try the dotted paths; they're not finished, but the others are perfectly plain and easy to follow. Which is prettiest? Why, Little Bubble Mountain, I believe,—the smaller of the two round-topped hills straight across the lake from the bungalow—has the finest view of any spot within reasonable distance of 'Seldom Inn,' and most of the way the path runs along by a delightful little brook."

So, in the pause while they waited for Friday evening's dinner to cook, Margaret brought out the trail-map, and the girls traced all the possible walks for Saturday morning. Dinner was animated with discussions of distances, map-scales, and the advisability of carrying luncheon along or coming home to it. Finally Margaret tactfully sounded Miss Cripps on her preferences for Saturday morning. Consternation reigned when Miss Cripps announced that wood-paths were much too rough for her taste.

"I quite agree with you, Miss Cripps," sighed Kittie, who was even then looking forward unhappily to washing the dinner dishes. "I will stay here and keep you company."

That disposed of Miss Cripps to perfection, and she and Miss Dutton saw no reason why the five remaining members of the party should not climb Little Bubble, if they wanted to, particularly since sober, reliable Margaret Lewis was one of the five.

So it was in a thoroughly contented mood that the girls gathered about the fire after dinner.

"It's silly to light it on such a summery night," said Nancy, "but we came to be silly if we felt like it, and to have a good time."

In a minute the flames were crackling and roaring splendidly.

"Isn't it great!" sighed Jane.

"What's that?" cried little Christina, pointing at a tiny gray ball that shot out of the very center of the glowing fire.

"How weird!" cried Plain Mary, as the tiny thing darted back and forth across the stone hearth.

"Why, it's only a dear little mouse!" announced Margaret, as the gray ball darted toward her.

"Oh!" cried Nancy, jumping up.

"O-o-o-h!" shrieked Miss Cripps, Kittie, Plain

Mary, and Christina in agitated chorus, while Miss Dutton, Jane, and Margaret laughed at them, and Lloyd, creeping softly toward the little mouse, caught and held him gently in her hand.

"He's more frightened than any of you," she said, "and no wonder. He'd built a house back there among the logs, I suppose."

"And then giants burnt it over his head, and camped around outside to capture him," said Nancy, coming closer, to look at the tiny, trembling captive.

"We'll put him outside, and he can make a new nest under a log that won't burn," said Lloyd, carrying Mr. Mouse, shivering and miserable, to the door, where, after a quick glance about with his beady black eyes, he scurried off into the sheltering, friendly dark.

"It's a sign of something or other, when a mouse runs out of the fire," Miss Cripps was saying, back in the bright sitting-room.

"I think I've heard that too," chimed in Margaret, "but I can't remember what it means. Wasn't it eerie when that little gray shape crept out of the very heart of the fire?"

"Perfectly ghostly," said Jane. "Can't some one remember the sign? Is it company or lovers or trouble?"

Miss Cripps rather thought it was some sort of

trouble, but what sort she wouldn't venture to say.

"Perhaps we're going to get lost to-morrow," suggested Lloyd. "The poor little mouse was certainly lost when he ran out of his burning nest."

"It must mean something strange and unusual," said Margaret, "and rather unfortunate. A mouse that nests in a fireplace is certainly in trouble—trouble that it must puzzle his poor little head to understand."

"Yes, he must think he's dreaming bad dreams," suggested Nancy, "when the fire wakes him up suddenly. I certainly thought I was dreaming when I saw him. And now," she added, "I'm going to get ready to dream in earnest,—or to sleep in earnest anyhow, so I shall be up early in the morning. I advise the rest of the breakfast shift to do likewise."

"And I advise everybody else to do likewise," Miss Dutton added, "because to-morrow is certainly going to be our busy day."

Jane and Nancy shared a dormer room, Kittie and Christina another, and Margaret and Lloyd the third, while Plain Mary, as the largest member of the party, was allotted the broad sitting-room couch, and shared Jane and Nancy's dressing-room. Getting settled took a great deal of talk

and laughter, and then there were ghostly bedside conferences, and much giggling and whispering of secrets between roommates. No wonder the breakfast shift,—since no one had thought to bring an alarm clock,—first overslept and then got into a nervous flutter that made effective haste impossible. So breakfast was half an hour later than had been planned, and the walking party set out to climb Little Bubble carrying a hastily prepared noonday "snack," and sternly resolved to get to the top in the scant time left them, if sprinting would do it.

"Racing along like this is the very best thing for Plain Mary, you know," Jane told Nancy comfortingly. "Hear her pant and wheeze!" Jane stooped to pull a pale brown puff-ball from a stump beside the path. "It's one of those things Miss Dutton was telling about," she explained, "that she said she and Lloyd would try to find enough of to fry for luncheon—no, for high tea—when we get back, hungry as wolves after this wild race. I say, Mary," Jane ran ahead to join her stout friend,—"I say, Mary, what'll you give me if I won't call you Puff-ball?"

Mary turned indignantly upon her questioner. "Jane Learned, you promised ——"

"Not to call you a name beginning with F," supplied Jane pleasantly. "And I've never re-

gretted promising. Name beginning with F was quite ordinary and unoriginal, but Puff-ball —— Why, Mary, Puff-ball would fit you like a glove, and stick to you like a postage stamp. Puff-ball, Puff for short ——"

"Jane!" begged Mary, with a hunted look on her fat face. "Jane, please don't talk so loud! They'll hear, and they'll all call me that horrid, horrid name. You're not a bit fair, but I'll have to do it—whatever you want me to, I mean."

"I merely desire," explained Jane loftily, "to see you renew your pristine enthusiasm for becoming a sylph. You ate too much dinner yesterday and too much breakfast this morning. You're planning to get Christina to turn back with you, when we stop at the next fork in the path to consult the trail-map."

"Jane Learned!" burst out Plain Mary. "How can you ——"

"Don't argue," cut in Jane loftily. "You know very well that it's no use."

"Yes, I do know," agreed Mary calmly, "and when you interrupted just now I was only going to ask you how you can always find out what people are thinking."

"Mary P. Smith," smiled Jane, "you are discerning, if you are no sylph. And if you want to turn back at the next fork, you may, as a reward for

your remarkable appreciation of my genius in understanding my fellow beings. Incidentally, I'm about ready to turn back myself."

For travelers in a hurry the path up Little Bubble was distinctly irritating, in spite of its beauty. It twisted and turned and rambled; it went up-hill and came down again; it crossed a brook on an insecure log bridge, over which it was necessary to help poor Christina, who grew giddy easily; and then it crossed back on stepping-stones. In short, the path to Little Bubble behaved a good deal like a pretty, spoiled child, bound to frolic along as it pleases, distracted by all the sights and sounds on the way, instead of marching straight forward, head up, eyes in front, to face the business of life.

"I don't think I can go quite so fast any longer," protested Christina finally.

"I'm sure there are yellow lady-slippers down in that swampy place," said Jane, craftily intent on securing a resting-space for her tired twin.

"I think so too. We're missing lots of lovely things, of course, by hurrying so," agreed Margaret, "but I thought we all wanted to be the first Fair Oaks girls to climb Little Bubble."

"Besides," added Nancy, "we set out to climb it and I, for one, want to accomplish what we set out to do."

"Of course"—Margaret, who was looking at her wrist-watch, had not paid much attention to Nancy's words,—"we must be back exactly when we agreed to." She glanced at the path ahead. "I do believe we're on the main slope of Little Bubble now, girls. Let's walk on fast till noon,—that's only fifteen minutes more,—and then eat, whether we've reached the top or not. After that we can decide better what to do next."

Whether or not they were on Bubble, the path now changed its mood and climbed steadily and sharply upward. By noon even sturdy Margaret and energetic Nancy were ready to rest. Luckily Margaret discovered a spring near the path, so they had plenty of crystal clear water; and if this was the same spring marked on the trail-map they were very near their goal—provokingly near, Nancy Lee felt, when, as they lay on a big flat rock resting after their luncheon, girl after girl announced that she, for one, was not in favor of going further.

"I've made a martyr of myself by coming so far," said Mary plaintively.

"I shall be tired to death before I get back to the station," added little Christina.

"That's so," commented Jane. "We must count on getting to the station, you know, and not merely to the house."

"Margaret, let's just dash to the top, to say

we've done it," pleaded Nancy, who was tired too, but didn't intend to admit it.

Margaret looked at her watch again. "Afraid we haven't time, Nancy. You see, there's not only the walk to the station to count in ; there's getting our 'high tea' ready. We can't come limping in at the last minute and expect Kittie and Lloyd and the guests of honor to do all the work."

"Of course not," agreed Nancy. "I'm no shirk," she added, smiling at the remembrance of poor Kittie's cure. "But oh, I do want to go to the top so ! Margaret Lewis, you told me yourself that people ought to strengthen their characters by doing what they set out to. So I think you might come with me. We can run all the way down the hills and overtake the others as easily as anything."

"I'm afraid I'd better not, Nancy," Margaret told her, flushing a little. "Hills and rough walking tire me a good deal. I shall have had all the exercise I want before night comes. I'm sorry, Nancy. You know ——"

"Oh, that's all right, Margaret," Nancy cut in hastily, bound not to be, a second time, the cause of Margaret's having to speak of her lameness. "Only I'm not tired—or only a tiny, tiny bit."

"I say," interposed Jane suddenly, "do you suppose a mouse running out of a fire is a sign of sleeping over ?"

"We certainly ran around like distracted mice, when we were hunting for the coffee this morning," laughed Margaret.

"We're not lost yet anyway," said little Christina. "But we may be, I suppose, before we're back. We'd better not take any chances by trying that new way home."

"Unless it's a shorter way," pleaded Plain Mary wearily.

But Nancy was not to be distracted from her purpose by futile discussions about a silly little mouse. "Well," she announced briskly, "I'm not worrying about that mouse. I'm going up to the top of Little Bubble. Since nobody wants to go with me, I'm going alone. I'm going to see the view and then run. Before you know I'm gone, I shall be back. Good-bye, ladies!" And Nancy was off, a flash of white up on the steep, rocky path among the spruce trees.

"You'd better not, N. Lee!" shouted Jane.

"You'll certainly get lost without the map," called Mary.

"You'll be scared, the woods are so still," shrieked Christina.

"Keep—looking—at—your—watch," chanted Margaret. She knew how swiftly the minutes slip by sometimes, when you are trying to do what you have set out to.

How much of her friends' warnings Nancy heard, they could not tell. She pulled off her "near-Panama" and waved it gaily at them, while the sun, shining on her face, turned her crown of hair to spun gold. Then she turned and danced lightly up the steep slope.

And this was the last Fair Oaks saw of Nancy Lee until that night, when, just as dreary dusk was settling into gruesome dark, she stumbled wearily up the dormitory steps. Her yellow hair was rumpled, her white jumper was white no longer, her hat brim was torn, and her tan walking-shoes were scarred and muddy. And over her left shoulder she carried a fat, sleepy, curly-haired, pink-fisted two-year baby. He was somewhat rumpled, like Nancy herself, but he was altogether adorable, nevertheless. He was the kind of baby that made Mary Ann, who opened the door for them, exclaim, "The darlint!" before she had welcomed Nancy, and even impelled worried, frightened Miss Marshall to smile at him, as she rushed out of her study the minute the door clicked, to cry, "Oh, Nancy, Nancy, where have you been?"

CHAPTER XII

AN I-FORGOT GIRL'S ADVENTURE

It was fortunate for the discipline of Fair Oaks School that the release bell rang just as Nancy Lee climbed the stairs to the third corridor. Nancy had been closeted with Miss Marshall in her study. Escorted by Miss Marshall, Miss Cripps, and Miss Dutton, none of whom had had the heart for dinner until she came back, she had gone to the dining-room, where Mary Ann served them all with a delicious hot supper. She had got it ready, she explained loftily, "for her dear lady, but there's enough for all of yez, an' welcome to what she ain't wantin'."

It was Mary Ann who had taken the baby from Nancy's stiff arms and carried him, by a curiously circuitous route that served to relieve the minds and stimulate the curiosity of the frightened girls up-stairs, down to the servants' parlor.

"And shure Cook's put him to bed, Miss Marshall," she explained, in answer to a question, "where he belongs, an' he'll stay quiet till mornin' if I can but be keepin' them gals out. They'll be

pilin' down th' instant the bell rings, if not sooner, so I'll lave yez to do yer own stretchin' fur this last course and be goin' down to tend to 'em. An' don't you be worritin' at all!"

Doors opened as Nancy and the bell reached her corridor together. They had been anxiously ajar —those doors—all through the study-hour, and Monday's classes would feel the disastrous effects thereof.

"Oh, but we rejoice to see you sound and safe!" cried Jeanne Durand quaintly.

"Great hat!" murmured Jane, her glance traveling from Nancy's torn hat to her muddy boots.

"Oh, you poor tired darling!" Christina patted Nancy's shoulder with a motherly, protecting air.

"Nancy!" exclaimed Grace Allen, who had evidently given up her roommate for lost and been crying about it.

"Where have you been?" demanded Lloyd and Kittie, for once in unison. "And where did you get that baby?"

Nancy smiled at them all rather wearily. "I'm awfully glad to be back," she said, "and you can't see the baby to-night, because Mary Ann says so. But if you'll run off and come again in five minutes, after I've scrubbed up a bit"—Nancy waved comprehensively at her disordered raiment—"why,

I'll do my best to satisfy the worst of your curiosity."

Five minutes later Nancy, in her becoming blue kimono, her yellow hair hanging in two smooth braids over her shoulders, sat cross-legged on Christina's bed—because the twins' bedroom was bigger than hers—and announced blandly to the girls, who huddled in a circle on the floor in front of her, that after her hot tub she felt exactly as good as new.

"Did you get scolded, Nancy?" asked somebody.

Nancy shook her head. "I guess I'm beyond scolding," she sighed. "And then the worst thing—taking the baby, I mean,—was an accident. Even Miss Cripps said it might have happened to any one. Girls, do you know, I think Miss Cripps loves babies!"

"Very likely," agreed Jane. "But that's no way to begin the tale of your adventures, N. Lee. Begin at the beginning."

"Yes! Tell us where you got the baby."

"Do you know its name?"

"Can it talk?"

"You shouldn't call a baby 'it,'" from Mildred. "This one's a boy; Mary Ann said so."

"I want to know where you were all the time," from Lloyd.

"And I want to know what they said to you down-stairs," from Kittie.

"Great hat, girls!" exasperated Jane Learned cut in on the flood of demands. "You'll never know anything at this rate. Now, Nancy, begin at the beginning. That's when you left us, to climb to the top of Little Bubble. And anybody who interrupts again will be put out."

"All right," chorused the others.

"Sh!" commanded Jane. "Now, Nancy."

Nancy laughed nervously. "Why, it's nothing to tell, really. I was just doing some of my usual careless things all the time, and they happened to turn out even worse than usual. After I left you girls, I went up to the top of the mountain, and hurrying down I got lost. And at the station a woman asked me ——"

"Stop," commanded Jane peremptorily. "That's no way ——"

"You're interrupting your own self," shrieked the rest of the audience. "Put Jane out!"

"I am not interrupting, my friends," demurred Jane with decision. "An interruption is a remark that stops the story. Whereas my remark, if I had been permitted to finish it, would have caused the story to proceed properly. Nancy Lee, you've studied the principles of narration and description here for nearly a year. Now begin all

over and tell us something. To quote one of our dear teachers, remember the value of picturesque details."

Nancy sighed and laughed and obediently started over. "Well, if you want details about getting up to the top of Bubble, Jane, it was an awful scramble all the rest of the way, and I fell down and skinned my knee. But I kept thinking how much I wanted to be the first Fair Oaks girl to get up to the top; so I went on. The view was lovely; but I just glanced at it, because I was in such a hurry. I can't understand why I didn't overtake the rest of you before I got to the first fork in the path, where I went wrong,—or at least I suppose I went wrong there."

"It probably took you longer to climb up than you thought. Did you keep looking at your watch?" asked Margaret.

Nancy blushed. "After a while I did, and it was a lot later than I supposed it could be. That worried me, and I ran, and didn't notice that I was on an entirely different path, till I suddenly stepped right into a regular bog. Then I hated to go all the way back, so I went on, until the path began to grow narrow and hard to follow, and in a minute it ended, or I lost it. So I had to go back after all."

"Weren't you scared?" demanded Christina in

awestruck tones. "Woods are so dark and lonesome when you're all by yourself."

"And when you're lost," added Kittie in a solemn, hollow voice.

"It was sort of creepy," admitted Nancy, "only I had to hurry so, and I was the most scared, I guess, for fear I should be too late to help about tea, and then you would all think I'd shirked. You see," added Nancy earnestly, "I set out to get up Little Bubble and down again in time to help about tea. And I don't intend to set out to do anything more," she added with decision, "except things that nobody could possibly get mixed up about, not even if they tried to on purpose."

"That's all right," said Jane soothingly. "Go on now about being rather scared but not so very, after the wrong path went out on you, like a burnt match, and left you all at sea."

Nancy laughed at Jane's mixed metaphor. "This would be a splendid story, Jane, if you were telling it."

"I'm not, though," said Jane enviously. "Do go on, Nancy."

"Well, the next thing that happened," proceeded Nancy, "was when I got to the other end of our lake. There was the path going back to the bungalow, and another one that skirted the other shore of the lake. That one had marked on its

sign-board: 'Lake path to town.' Well, I looked at my watch again, and decided that if I tried to go to the bungalow, I couldn't possibly, even by running a lot, get the four-forty train that we had planned to take home. I never thought that any one would wait for me at the bungalow, as Miss Dutton and Mary did, till almost five. So I just took the left-hand fork to town. When I got to the station, it was four-forty-five and nobody was there but a horrid one-eyed man, with brown skin and blue pictures on his arms."

"Tattoo-marks, you mean, Nancy," interposed Lloyd. "Lots of the herders have them."

"A tattooed man then," nodded Nancy. "He said 'good-afternoon' and stared at me, and the ticket window was closed, so finally I looked at the time-table on the wall and found another train at half-past six. Then I decided to go for a walk—not because I wouldn't a lot rather have sat down and rested, but the tattooed man was so unpleasant to be there alone with. So I went on up the road. After I'd gone a little way, I looked around and he wasn't following me, so I sat down by the side of the road to wait."

"And about that time," interposed Margaret, "one distracted chaperon and five badly frightened girls were arranging with the village constable to send a search party up Little Bubble,

and then rushing to the station to hear the fatal 'no news' from Miss Dutton and Mary, and to catch the five-ten for home and Miss Marshall, who would think what else could be done."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Nancy. "If only I'd noticed in the first place that I was looking at the Sunday train-schedule! It does seem as if I never had so many things go wrong in one day before."

"Do hurry and get to the baby," begged Christina.

"Do!" chorused the others.

"Well," began Nancy, "while I was sitting by the roadside, just where the woods begin and the cross-path to 'Seldom Inn,' a woman came along carrying the baby. She said good-afternoon and I said good-afternoon, and then she said it was 'hard nuts carrying a heavy kid' and sat down beside me. She was dark like the man, and she had a blue handkerchief over her head instead of a hat, and big earrings in her ears. But she had a nice, pleasant face, and I wasn't afraid of her. And besides, the baby was awfully cunning—oh, girls, he's certainly a perfect dear!—and he laughed and grabbed at my hat, and I began to play with him, and then the woman and I got to talking. I was tired too, though I hadn't anything to carry but myself; and I told her all

about our party and how I'd gone off alone and got lost and all. She asked lots of questions about me and Fair Oaks and the other girls. I remember she asked twice whether there were many rich girls in the school, and she laughed when I said I really didn't know. After a while she got up and started off toward the station. 'I'm going to take the kid to see his granny,' she told me. I asked her if her train went at half-past six, and she said she thought so. In a few minutes I happened to think that my watch might be slow, so I went back too." Nancy paused. "Am I giving enough details?" she demanded tantalizingly. "One horrible detail that I almost forgot to mention was that I'd walked a blister on my left heel, and it hurt."

"Do go on, Nancy!"

"Hurry, and get to the baby."

"It's babies, not blisters, we are interested in."

"Sh!"

"The woman was at the station," continued Nancy. "When I got there, I remember she was standing by the window writing something with a pencil the ticket man had lent her. I asked about my train, and found it went at quarter-past six on week days. Then I sat down, and she didn't pay any attention to me. Once she went out on the platform and talked to the horrid man,

who was still there. I heard her say 'So long, Jake! You'd better go and hitch up.' Then he went off, and she sat down and fussed with the baby's clothes for a while. I wanted awfully to go and play with the baby some more, but I didn't, because I thought perhaps it wouldn't be proper, when the woman looked so queer—though I guess she looked a good deal more respectable than I did," laughed Nancy.

"Well, finally it got to be almost quarter-past six, and all of a sudden the woman screamed, and jumped up and said she'd forgotten her satchel, and would I hold the baby while she went to the store after it—she'd left it there, right across the street. 'If I ain't back when the train comes, get on with the kid and save me a seat,' she said.

"The baby was too sweet for anything. He cuddled right down in my lap and went to sleep, and when the train came I got on as she told me to, without waking him out of his nap. And the train started, and the woman didn't come, but I thought she was in some other car, and she wasn't, so I got off at the next station, six miles further on, and they telegraphed back, and the ticket man at Bubble Station said, was she a gypsy and did she have a dark, ugly man with her. Because if so, the whole camp was gone—vanished into the woods like ghosts—and he didn't believe they'd

ever be seen again. So I took the next train the rest of the way here, and—well, you can't just drop a baby, you know," ended Nancy, apologetically, "so I had to bring him along."

There was a chorus of amazed "Ohs!" from the audience, whom Nancy's rapid, almost unpunctuated climax had left quite breathless with excitement.

"Do you suppose a mouse running out of a fire does really mean getting lost?" inquired Lloyd Mallory.

"Or does it mean an adventure?" suggested Margaret.

"Or a baby," sighed Jane, who was bursting with envy of Nancy.

"Tell us more about the baby, Nancy," begged Christina.

Nancy's tired eyes sparkled suddenly. "Well, he's awfully fat," she began, "and I agree with the woman that he's hard to carry. But oh, he's so sweet! He has little yellowish curls down in his neck and on his forehead. He has some cunning little teeth. I don't know whether or not he can really talk. He called me something that sounded like 'Mamma,' and he wasn't a bit afraid of me; so maybe he mistook me for his real mother,—if that woman was his mother. Of course," explained Nancy hastily, "we don't look

much alike, but it was pretty dark in the train and at that little station where we stopped to telephone. His hands are too cute for anything—all pink and dimpled. He can walk some, I guess, only I didn't dare to let him try. And he acts awfully bright. Mary Ann seems to know a lot about babies, and she says he's a lovely one. He slept most of the way here," ended Nancy, looking as if the idea of sleeping appealed to her too.

But just then there was a businesslike knock on the twins' study door, and Mary Ann, who knew a lot about babies, stalked in.

"Miss Nancy here?" she demanded. "Cook found this 'ere letter pinned on the baby's petticoat. It's fer you most likely, Miss Nancy, but I read it to make sure, and then I wa'n't sure, so I took it to my dear lady. The baby's asleep, the darlint! No, you can't see him to-night, Miss Jane. I'll be sayin' good-avnin' to yez all."

The note, scrawled on a scrap of dirty wrapping-paper, was not addressed to any one in particular.

"ime tired lookin' after a babby," it ran. "we stole him out west fer the reward, the rich people they never bit. Jake will be mad he likes him but im sick of it. it's a hard life i have anyways. All the same i alwais treeted the kid right. praps some rich gerl will take him. You'll never find

his peple we couldn't an now its ten monts sense he was stole.

"We call him Timmy.

"he was stole in Mizzori.

"Wen you git this we will be Gone.

"Hes two yer old and kan talk some."

Long before Nancy had finished deciphering it, Jane had calmly appropriated the paper, and haltingly, with some help from Nancy and Margaret, she read its contents aloud, her audience growing more excited with the completion of each clumsy, ill-spelled sentence.

"They kidnapped him!"

"Out in Missouri."

"They call him Timmy. What a horrid name for a cute baby!"

"Two years old, and think of the awful things that have happened to him!"

"Jake was the tattooed man, I suppose."

"That's why she asked about the rich girls in the school. She evidently wanted him to be 'treeted right,' even if she was sick of him."

"Well, Nancy Lee," Jane summed up the whole matter, "this is the biggest prize excitement that ever dropped out of a clear sky on anybody's head. Wish it had hit me!"

Nancy stared. "You don't understand, Jane. The gypsies are gone, and anyway the woman isn't

with them. Or at least Miss Marshall has been telephoning, and a woman like her took the train at the station beyond Bubble Lake—an express train West. Miss Marshall doesn't think she can be found, nor that the others in the party can be held responsible, if they don't want the baby."

"Well, anyhow," said Plain Mary, who had listened in silent, spellbound amazement to the tale of Nancy's adventures, "it's not her baby nor their baby, if the letter is true. And it sounds true; nobody would think to make up all that."

"You're trying to say, Mary," interposed Jane, "that truth is stranger than fiction."

"All right," agreed Mary. "But what I was really trying to say is that, if the baby is as dear as Nancy says, we ought to be thankful that he has been rescued from those horrid gypsies. I saw the man, Nancy, in the station when we took the train that you didn't notice on the time-card. I suppose he was Jake, who liked the baby. But I shouldn't want him to touch any baby that I liked."

"Do you suppose," demanded Kitty suddenly, "that if the baby's mother and father are trying to find him, and should find him now, they'd arrest Nancy for kidnapping?"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Nancy in despairing tones. "That's something I hadn't thought of."

"They wouldn't think of it, either," Margaret assured her. "They'd love you for having been the means of getting him into good hands."

"Can he stay here, Nancy?" asked Lloyd anxiously, fearing lest the curious restrictions which hedged her about at Fair Oaks might also rule out stray babies.

"Where can he go if he doesn't stay here?" demanded practical Christina.

"Oh, dear, I don't know," Nancy answered them sadly. "I don't know what's to happen about anything. I only know that it's all my fault—that is, I did know that, but after seeing the woman's letter I don't feel quite so dreadfully to blame. I'm just all mixed up." Nancy's face grew white suddenly, and her eyelids drooped. "And I'm tired all the way through. Let me get into bed quick, please."

Nancy was still tired enough the next morning to take advantage of Miss Marshall's suggestion that she breakfast in bed. But as soon as she had eaten her strawberries, her habitual energy returned, and, as she nibbled her rolls, she wrote of "The Most Exciting Day of my Life" in the Red Journal.

"So my motto is worse than Grace's ever thought of being," began the concluding paragraph. "It sounds so safe and so improving, but

see how it worked! It wasn't out of a great author's book, either.

"Excitements are nice in a way. Jane is ready to cry because she didn't go along with me and have this one drop on her. But everything is so fearfully complicated. Jane says I'm a heroine, but I know I'm a careless girl.

"I think I see the Ogre walking in the Princess's garden, so I guess I'll get up. Maybe before I go to algebra I may see the baby. I wonder if he'll know me. If he doesn't, why, he doesn't know anybody in the whole world, except people that are lost, poor baby!

"*Afternoon recreation:*

"One thing is setted out of all the mix-up. I'm to stay in bounds for two weeks because I wasn't back at the bungalow when I was told to be, and because I climbed up Bubble alone, which wasn't what I had permission to do. Miss Marshall said that perhaps my 'subsequent misfortunes might be considered punishment enough,' but she thinks best to add a definite penalty. That's because I'm N. Lee (which stands for an I-Forgot Girl).

"N. B. I know Miss Marshall is right. Having the girls treat me like a heroine had sort of made me feel like one, I guess, and that's no way for me to feel. Besides, having a strenuous motto isn't

any excuse for staying out over-hours, so there's no doubt that I deserve the penalty. Anybody but Miss Marshall would have thought I deserved more than that. She's so fair, never mixing up the accidental results of things (like the baby) with the things themselves, that you're really to blame for (like going further up Bubble than I had time for and going alone). I do want to be taught not to be careless—only sometimes it's pretty hard to learn.

"N. B. The rest of the Ogre's Fair Oaks friends are out motoring in his car. Mary Ann has taken the baby riding in Cook's little sister's go-cart. It's a gorgeous day. No, I'm not crying, Red Journal—not now!"

As the Ogre's motor-party came back from their ride, they happened to overtake Mary Ann and the baby, and Dr. Jim gathered them in, go-cart and all, and took them for an extra turn through the village—Mary Ann mournfully bewailing the absence of her best hat, "wid a red rose an' a streamin' white feather, sor, on behint." When they were back at Fair Oaks once more, Dr. Jim lifted out the baby,—who was gurgling joyously and calling all his new friends "mamma" in a friendly fashion that made poor Mary Ann quite mad with jealousy,—swung him up on his shoulder, and carried him on a sort of triumphal progress round

the campus, annexing more followers at every step.

Nancy was watching the show forlornly from a hammock down by the boat-house, longing to join in the fun, but hesitating because Dr. Jim must know of the disgraceful reason that had kept her from going on the motor-trip.

But Dr. Jim spied her and called, "Come on, Miss Nancy, and help me show off your baby!" in such a hearty fashion that Nancy forgot her embarrassment and ran up the hill.

Dr. Jim was just swinging the laughing baby off his shoulder. "Well, you're certainly a friendly, cheerful specimen, Master Timmy," he said, setting Timmy carefully on his feet. "Now, sir, can you walk? I thought so! Hello, Miss Nancy! He wanted you too, you see."

Nancy blushed with pleasure, as Timmy, curls bobbing, fat arms waving, fat legs pumping in uncertain, baby haste, ran straight for his oldest friend, gurgling "Mamma," this time with a joyous conviction that made his devoted Mary Ann fairly dance with rage, though she loved him more than ever for "showing off" so effectively.

"Shure, doctor, there's some words he do be sayin' with the right meanin's," Mary Ann explained significantly, wiggling the go-cart suggestively at her small charge. "He called out at ivry

horse we was after meetin', he did, and he got it right ivry time."

"Good for Timmy!" smiled Dr. Jim.

"He said 'choo-choo' to the train," added Nancy proudly, sitting down on the grass to let Timmy fulfil his very evident desire to pull her hair.

"He's a great boy," said Dr. Jim, beaming on the assembly, "and a great addition to Fair Oaks. I feel much more at home with a fine fellow like Timmy on hand to keep me in countenance among so many ladies."

Timmy suddenly lost interest in Nancy's hair and looked curiously around him. Then, with a gurgle of joy, he stood up carefully, hanging by Nancy's arm, and tottered straight across the circle of girls to Vera Lawson. Vera was standing a little apart from the others, smiling a very effective smile, with which she had meant, undoubtedly, to impress Dr. Jim. Unfortunately it only impressed Timmy, who ran up to Vera and attempted a coy conquest of the school beauty by burying his curly head in her white serge skirt.

Her smile vanished. Vera stooped and firmly detached the small clinging fingers from her immaculate draperies.

"Take him, please," she ordered Mary Ann. "I —he—oh, thank you,"—as Mary Ann, stalking

scornfully forward, gathered the astonished baby into her strong, kindly arms, and then calmly defied Dr. Jim's recent hints about the rules of modern hygiene by kissing him—on both cheeks.

Dr. Jim did not return to the subject of modern hygiene. Instead he smiled his best smile at Mary Ann, and started back to his car, trundling the go-cart, which she had quite forgotten in her indignation at Vera's haughty behavior.

"I shall be up again soon," he promised Plain Mary, when, after a brief interview with Miss Marshall, he prepared to depart. "Not to see you, young woman! That baby is the magnet that draws me. Also, I've made a proposition to Miss Marshall, that I may have to see her again about. By the way, Mary, your friend Miss Lawson doesn't seem to care for babies."

Poor Mary blushed silently for Vera.

"Oh, well, we can't all think alike," Dr. Jim said kindly. "But I'm glad you aren't that kind of girl. I'm glad that you and Miss Nancy and Miss Jane are all just as crazy about young Timmy as I am. Good-bye, Mary. Write me about Timmy." And Dr. Jim was off at top speed, as usual.

CHAPTER XIII

PUPPIES AND NAMING PARTIES

"TIMMY may stay for a few days, if he doesn't interfere with the regular routine of our work."

So, with informal brevity, did Fair Oaks re-phrase Miss Marshall's eagerly awaited announcement about the immediate disposal of the baby.

He was no longer merely "the baby." He was Timmy. Timmy may not be the ideal name for an altogether adorable two-year-old infant, with a smile for everybody, words for the really interesting features of his world, such as horses, dogs, and "choo-choos," and emphatic gestures and gurgles whereby to indicate and enforce his numerous demands upon life. But, as Jane Learned said, "He's used to it, and it's the only thing he can keep that he is used to, his own clothes all having been burned up in the interests of sanitation. Of course it's possible that Timmy is his real name. And besides, if we undertook to rechristen him, think of the row there'd be!"

During the forty-eight hours in which Timmy's fate hung in the awful balance between the desire

of all Fair Oaks that he should stay where he was for the present, and Dr. Jim's very generous offer to put him in a children's hospital in Boston, pending the success of Miss Marshall's advertisements in Missouri and Middle Western papers,—during those difficult forty-eight hours it could not truthfully be said that the school routine ran in its accustomed well-oiled grooves.

"If Timmy's going in a day or two, let's not have any crew-practice till then," suggested Margaret Lewis to Billy Bray.

"I hadn't intended to have any this afternoon," retorted the Red captain rather crossly. Not for the world would brusque Billy Bray have acknowledged that she preferred playing with babies like Timmy to commanding the good ship "Invincible."

"Please couldn't we sew to-day, instead of having outdoor exercises?" begged Christina Learned of Madame Lamark. "Then we could make some cunning little clothes for Timmy. The ones that Miss Cr—the ones that were bought for him don't let him look half so cute as he really is."

"But you need ze air and ze exercise," Madame told her, "and Timmy is warm and happy in ze ugly ready-mades. You were not so attentive last week, Miss Learned, that I should suspect you of loving to sew for a baby."

Lloyd Mallory, who had not learned to spend money, remembered the crumpled roll of bills in her bureau drawer, and blushingly tendered all but one, which she might need, to the friendly Miss Dutton, who had won her heart by understanding the magic of violet-beds. "For Timmy," she explained. "To—oh, to take care of him, you know." Lloyd rushed off to hide her embarrassment, and then returned to add, "I think father will give me more for him, when that's gone."

"But you must ask your father's permission, Lloyd, before you give away this," Miss Dutton told her. "And meanwhile you certainly ought to open a bank account. It's not right to leave such a sum of money around your rooms. It's putting temptation in the way of the servants."

"Yes, Miss Dutton," said Lloyd meekly, puzzled anew over the odd distinctions and regulations that prevailed in this strange world, where money and the possession of money exerted an influence that Lloyd could not understand.

Cook and Mary Ann bore themselves, through these days, with a sudden accession of importance,—somewhat difficult in the case of Mary Ann, who was already ultra-important,—such as befitted young Timmy's caretakers and special guardians. But when Mary Ann started proudly out to give Timmy his airing, she found her way

beset by determined, cajoling damsels, with fire in their eyes for one another, and bribes in both hands for Mary Ann, who was, "Please to let me take Timmy just while you call on Mrs. Barton's parlor-maid,"—"Only as far as the corner,"—"All by myself, please, dear Mary Ann."

Cook complained that ghostly figures flitted about her bedroom door, waiting a chance to see Timmy asleep. And every teacher—except one—complained of poorly prepared lessons and wandering attention. The indulgent exception was Miss Cripps, whose own attention was far too distracted by the charms of Timmy to note the distraction of her pupils, and whose agitation at the thought of having those charms buried from her ken in a city hospital was at least as acute as that of any of her sentimental young charges.

But Miss Marshall's announcement put a sudden and decisive end to all these unbecoming vagaries of conduct. If the girls didn't let Timmy interfere with their school work, he should stay, Miss Marshall promised, until some definite plans could be made for his future. Perhaps that might not be until the spring term had ended. Everything depended, of course, upon the promptness with which the advertisements she had sent broadcast were answered. They might not be answered at all; indeed the letter pinned to Timmy's skirt

might be a delusive fabrication. But the possibility that its statements were true must be acted upon, before anything else could be done about disposing of the baby.

"So here's hoping that Timmy's parents don't turn up too soon!" said Jane Learned. "And meanwhile it's jolly well up to us, as the saying goes. It's up to us to keep Timmy. The girl who flunks or fuddles or breaks rules will hereafter be considered a public enemy, and will be treated as such. That's a Rule, Christina darling; so buck up on your hated algebra. Nobody can do more than her best, but don't forget that what you have never done before, you can do again,—for Timmy."

"For Timmy," speedily came to be a sort of watchword at Fair Oaks. Of course, like other watchwords with which Nancy Lee had experimented, this one held unsuspected pitfalls. When Kittie Westervelt went down-town without arranging for proper chaperonage, to have her heart-shaped locket—no longer fashionable enough for Kittie's own wear,—marked with Timmy's name, she was amazed to find that her charitable motive held no excuse. Miss Marshall adjudged the accustomed penalty—a week within bounds—and relentlessly added a special theme on "Sensible Charity," over which illogical, empty-headed

Kittie wept bitter tears, in spite of Miss Cripps's unusual leniency in the matter of the paragraphing. Besides this, poor Kittie suffered the pitiless displeasure of her friends. So did Jane Learned, when Madame Lamark found her "outside work" in sewing carelessly and hastily done. So even did the wonderful Vera Lawson, when she was caught in possession of smuggled caramels. It was "up to" the girls to keep Timmy, and the surest way—the only way—was to achieve exemplary behavior. Never before had there been such a reign of order, studiousness, and spontaneous obedience at Fair Oaks School for Girls.

Nancy Lee welcomed the turn of public sentiment as an added incentive toward the avoidance of that fatal red circle, the appearance of which on her "Neatness and Order" record would plunge her into dire disgrace. If she was on probation, so now, in a manner, were all the rest of the girls; and Timmy's continued presence depended upon their being true to the terms of their parole.

Of course Nancy Lee cared a little more about Timmy than any one else. She loved babies in general, and adorable babies in particular. And then, hadn't she found this baby and brought him home? And didn't Cook slyly give her nut-cake between meals, and the haughty Mary Ann call her "dearie," in consequence?

To be sure, Timmy was connected, though without any evil intentions on his part, with Nancy's being, for two interminable weeks, obliged to take her outdoor exercise on a certain constricted portion of the campus, which included only one inferior tennis court, the outdoor basket-ball field, now practically deserted, the croquet-ground, and the beginners' swimming pool. From this Nancy had long since graduated, but now she humbly returned, to paddle mournfully about with little Sarah and the "duffers" like Plain Mary, who tried faithfully day after day, but apparently couldn't learn the strokes.

Three separate times within the two unending weeks, the Ogre's gray car drove dashingly up to the dormitory door, and Plain Mary, Jane, and Vera, with Miss Cripps or Miss Dutton to chaperon, and Christina or Margaret or Mildred in the places left vacant by Nancy and Kittie's being "in bounds," went spinning off on gay expeditions in search of fresh air, fun, and "tea." Once Miss Marshall acted as chaperon, and that day they took Timmy along. Nancy felt then that her cup of woe was full; but if so, it must have dripped over when Billy Bray, who had not noticed the curtailment of Nancy's liberty, came to her with an astounding proposal.

"The Blue Crew have lent us their boat to use

for trial races, and we're returning the favor with ours. They plan to race against just scrub crews, picked up when the time comes; but I'm going to pit the Reds against the best outside material I can get hold of. So I'm regularly organizing a 'sub' crew, and I want you to captain it."

Nancy blinked hard, as she explained that for five days more (counting Sunday) she couldn't even visit the boat-house to watch the Invincibles pull out; and as for asking her to row on a "sub" crew, Billy might just as well invite her to fly to the moon.

Billy did not harrow Nancy's feelings with futile expressions of sympathy. "Too bad," she said brusquely. "Five days means to next Wednesday, doesn't it? Then I'll hold the place for you till then. It's only fair, after all the time you spent practicing with us. Besides, we want you."

Nancy could have hugged Billy—if Billy had not walked off before she had caught her breath for joy. To help the Invincibles to victory, to be in the confidence of their adored captain, to know the signs and passwords and the "inside" crew-gossip, to be herself a captain, though only of "subs"—that was surely a close next-best to being in the Red Boat. And they would wait five days for her!

"They shan't be sorry," she resolved. "They shall see that I'm worth waiting for. I'll give them some practice-races! And I won't miss a single day—no, not even if Dr. Jim asks me to go motoring and hold Timmy in my lap all the way."

Luckily Nancy was saved the necessity of this crowning renunciation. It was fully two weeks before Dr. Jim came to see Mary again; and then he merely ran down from the Castle for a hasty after-dinner call. Mary went in alone to greet him, but in a few moments she was off again in search of Nancy and Jane.

"He's come over here to be cheered up," she explained excitedly, "and when I said I'd get you two to help—because I'm rather afraid of him when he's so dreadfully sober—he seemed to like the idea."

"Feeling ogre-ish again, is he?" asked Jane, as the three girls hurried from the dusky campus, where most of the school was wandering about, to the little reception-room where the Ogre was waiting.

"Don't, Jane," objected Nancy, who had grown very fond of Dr. Jim since his many kindnesses to Timmy. "He's not cross; he's worried, and maybe it's about that same poor boy—the one he wanted the moon for. I've noticed that the Ogre is awfully fond of boys—little ones like Timmy,

and bigger ones like those we meet out motoring, or like that sick Rob."

"Yes," agreed Jane, "the Ogre can put up with girls, particularly slender ones, but deep down in his crusty heart he is all for boys—sensible old Ogre!"

By the time they reached the reception-room, Dr. Jim had discovered the loveliness of the dusky campus, and insisted upon joining the strollers there.

Mary pulled Jane back to walk with her. "Nancy will talk to him about Timmy," she whispered. "She had Timmy out with her to-day, trotting around the croquet-ground, and he was awfully dear and comical. That will cheer up Dr. Jim."

But Nancy, never thinking that the great Dr. Arnold James might not care to discuss his patients with her—realizing only that, when you are worried, talking does help a little—Nancy did not so much as mention the comical Timmy. Instead she smiled sympathetically up into the tall doctor's grave face, and asked, "How's that poor boy, Rob?"

Dr. Jim started in surprise, and then smiled gratefully down at Nancy. "Yes, I was thinking about Rob," he acknowledged. "I was wondering whether, when he gets out of hospital, he'd be

lonesome up on my farm in the Berkshires, or happy there."

"So he's going to have the rest and change that you said he needed?" asked Nancy tactfully, not bothering Dr. Jim with questions about Rob's stay in the hospital, of which she had not heard before.

"He's going to have a little of it at least," Dr. Jim told her. "He's been operated on since I first spoke to you about him—for a bad arm that he'd smashed in an accident at his father's mill, and that didn't get proper care and rest while it was healing. And his family is at last waking up to the fact that, if he doesn't get rid of his cough before long, he never will. So they're at last resigned to losing him for a paltry three months or so; and that gives me my chance."

"Do you ever go to your farm?" demanded Nancy abruptly.

"Once in two or three weeks I spend a night there."

"Then," said Nancy, "I think Rob will like it there. He'll have your visits to look forward to, and every time you come he'll be a little better and stronger, and he'll have that to look forward to. And between times he'll have the farm animals. All boys like animals. But if this Rob is sort of serious and doesn't care much about fun, I advise you to get him a puppy. A person

can't be very serious or lonely with a puppy around."

Again Dr. Jim's tired face flashed into a sudden smile. "Miss Nancy, that's an idea! I'll buy a puppy to-morrow, and Rob shall take him out to the farm himself. If keeping a puppy out of mischief, according to the severe standards of my old caretaker, doesn't get Rob's mind out of its rut and put a little youth and fun into him, I don't know puppies or boys."

The next minute he turned to joke Jane on the absurd appearance of her shadow. Then he challenged Mary to race him to Mrs. Barton's fence, where, announcing gaily that he should be up again "before young Timmy is a week older," he left them.

But in a minute he was back, with amusing excuses for having neglected to escort "the ladies" to their own door.

"He's cheered up all right," said Jane to Nancy, when the final good-byes had been said. "What did you talk about?"

"Puppies, mostly," answered Nancy demurely, "puppies and that boy Rob. The Ogre thinks he can get the moon for him after all."

"What did I tell you?" triumphed Jane. "I knew our Ogre could get the moon, if he wanted it so much. And while we're on the subject of

this boy with no last name,—and so Nancy boldly calls him Rob,—don't you think we ought to choose a last name for Timmy? Last names aren't so important as first ones, so there won't be any great row over it, perhaps. Anyhow, row or no row, it ought to be attended to. Timmy's parents may not show up for weeks and weeks, if they ever do. Meanwhile it's up to us to see to it that he has his rights. And a whole name, with at least two parts to it, is the right of every two-year-old kiddie. Let's go and talk to Miss Marshall about it this very minute."

The results of Jane's eloquent defense of the thesis that every "two-year-old kiddie" has a right to a "regular temporary name" reached beyond Jane's wildest dreams. Miss Marshall laughingly admitted that one name, and that so plebeian as Timmy, ill matched the deserts of "our baby"; and she deftly warded off the "row" that Jane had foreseen by asserting unhesitatingly that Nancy Lee was the proper person to complete Timmy's cognomen.

"Then I'll do it right away, Miss Marshall," said Nancy, dimpling. "I suppose Timmy is short for Timothy, isn't it? I name our baby Timothy Marshall."

"Why, Nancy, how very, very nice!" cried Miss Marshall, with an unsteady little laugh that

"I HOPE YOU'VE DECIDED WHERE WE'D BETTER GO"

was full of real pleasure. "This is one of the sincerest compliments I ever had paid me. Tell me, does giving Timmy my surname, temporarily, mean that I'm to be allowed to adopt him—temporarily? I should like ——"

"Oh, but we all want to adopt him, please," begged Plain Mary. "Couldn't we take turns in really looking after him? Wouldn't you please speak to Mary Ann about it, Miss Marshall? We could be trusted if somebody told us how first. And it's certainly a useful thing for girls to learn, —to look after a small child."

"It certainly is, Mary," agreed Miss Marshall promptly. "And I will consult Cook and Mary Ann at once. They've been so kind, and done so much for the baby, in addition to all their regular work, that we owe them every consideration. But they'll be generous, I know. With their help we will make out a schedule of hours and duties, which the girls who want to share in 'adopting' Timmy shall fill in. Only learning to wash and dress and undress and feed a baby mustn't interfere with the other lessons, of course ——"

"Oh, no, Miss Marshall!" cried the three ambassadors, in so eager a chorus that Miss Marshall laughed in their faces.

"How shall I ever keep you in order after Timmy is gone?" she sighed. Then, with a swift

change of expression, she added gaily, "I've thought of something, girls. Please let us keep Timmy's new name, that I'm so proud of, a secret among us until—well, until I give the word."

Next morning after chapel exercises, Miss Marshall gravely explained about "the new elective course in baby-tending, which the baby's present caretakers, overworked though they must be, have reluctantly consented to allow me to establish. A professional nurse from Boston, highly recommended by Dr. Arnold James, will give lectures and practical demonstrations, as preliminary to the real work of the course. Candidates will kindly inscribe their names on the paper provided for that purpose and posted on the official bulletin-board. There also appears a schedule, entitled 'Timmy's Day,' the divisions of which, indicating Timmy's various needs for each forty minute period, will serve to indicate to prospective workers the general character of the course. Candidates will not be expected to devote more than one period per day to the new elective."

When the crowd that buffeted about the bulletin-board at the close of the morning chapel had signed the designated paper and departed to other duties, it was found that, with four exceptions, every Fair Oaks girl had elected the new course in baby-tending.

"Timmy'll have to split his periods, as popular girls do their dances," said little Christina, thoughtfully comparing the long list of names with the brief schedule of "Timmy's Day."

"I wonder if Miss Marshall thought so many would elect the course," said Margaret Lewis.

"I guess she'll realize now, if she hasn't before, that Timmy belongs here," said earnest Mildred Wallace. "The only thing this school needed to make it just about perfect was a dear little baby like Timmy."

"So say I!" declared Jane Learned heartily. "Christina darling, allow me to congratulate you on choosing Fair Oaks School for the great and only Twins to come to. It's a jolly old school. Miss Marshall's bungalow is a little bit of all right, and Nancy's baby goes it one better. Hurrah for Nancy and Timmy! And now Christina darling, let us turn our attention to the war in the Balkans. We've got to shine in Current Topics, you know,—for Timmy."

In the middle of luncheon that noon, Miss Marshall smilingly rose in her place and invited all her girls to "a naming party in honor of Timmy," to take place under the Crooked Elm at four o'clock.

What on earth was a "naming party"? Jane Learned, exchanging knowing glances with Nancy

and Mary Smith, refused even to guess. As a matter of fact she had no theories on the subject, beyond the perfectly safe one that at the party the secret of Timmy's new name would be publicly divulged.

It took stern and constantly renewed resolutions on the part of the Fair Oaks girls to devote the early hours of that afternoon to hard, honest study of next day's lessons. But Fair Oaks, fearing to risk the loss of its baby, struggled nobly to achieve concentration, and partially succeeded.

Just before four o'clock Miss Marshall, in her prettiest white dress, and Timmy, in an entirely new costume, also white and so becoming that even the fastidious Christina deigned to approve it, walked hand in hand across the campus, and established themselves comfortably on a rustic seat under the Crooked Elm. Mary Ann followed with a rug, so that Timmy might play on the grass when he tired of the narrow confines of the rustic bench. Cook waddled behind Mary Ann with a huge bowl of lemonade, which she placed on a little table at Miss Marshall's elbow. And the eager girls and their hardly less eager instructors hurried after Cook, the instant that the release bell permitted them to do so.

"I'm so glad you're all here," Miss Marshall, her arm around Timmy, greeted them. Then she

"DON'T YOU LIKE THAT BETTER?"

repeated Jane's argument in favor of Timmy's having a "regular temporary name."

"I agree that he should have one," Miss Marshall concluded. "Don't you?"

A vociferously chorused affirmative answered her.

"And so I at once asked Nancy Lee to finish his name for him," Miss Marshall went on, "because I thought it should be her privilege."

Another vociferous affirmative.

"Well, I did it," explained Nancy smilingly. "I did it right away. I named him Timmy—Timothy Marshall."

"Which I now amend to Timothy Lee Marshall," added Miss Marshall promptly. "Don't you like that better? I'm very proud to have Timmy take my name, and I think Nancy will feel the same way about his using hers. Now, as I'm sure you're all tired, let's drink to the health and happiness of Timmy Lee Marshall in Cook's very best lemonade."

"U-um!" cried Timmy, trying hard to tumble head-first into the lemonade-bowl.

"Miss Marshall," began Christina Learned, when the toast to Timmy Lee Marshall had been duly drunk, "don't you think we ought to choose a color for Timmy? Babies that have regular mothers always have colors—generally pink or

blue," went on Christina, in explanation. "Then if you want to give them things,—I mean useful things," added Christina hastily, remembering Kittie's sad experience with the locket,—"like a carriage afghan that my mother has promised to knit, why, you always know what color to choose."

"Which color do you suggest, Christina?" asked Miss Marshall, quite seriously.

Christina favored pink.

Kittie Westervelt thought blue more appropriate for a boy.

The vote, taken by counting hands, showed a majority of ten for blue, and Christina absented herself from the festivities long enough to send her mother the needed information on a post-card.

In the midst of the naming party the nurse from Boston arrived—a tall, pretty woman, who instantly won everybody's heart by calling Timmy a fine boy. But upon being asked by Miss Marshall to make a few remarks, Nurse Boyne spoke of the sensible modern custom of keeping young children quiet, free from excitement, and out of crowds. Whereat Timmy howled lustily by way of showing the evil effects of exciting and noisy assemblies upon his nervous system, and the naming party melted away shamefacedly, muttering vague fears that Nurse Boyne would "spoil all the fun."

"No, she won't," declared Jane Learned loyally. "Not if Dr. Jim likes her."

"Dr. Jim likes fun as well as we do," averred Plain Mary.

"And besides we all must be nice to Miss Boyne and do as she says," added Nancy Lee, "because it's best—for Timmy."

CHAPTER XIV

A NEST-EGG FOR TIMMY

The Princess had heard a great deal about Timmy from Dr. Jim, but, as long as Nancy was kept in bounds, she had tactfully refrained from asking the Real Girls to bring him to see her; and she still shrank, with an odd little remnant of her old nervous terror, from coming over to Fair Oaks, where Real Girls swarmed—delightful creatures, no doubt, like all girls, but unknown to her and therefore in some mysterious fashion terrible, except at a safe distance.

Dr. Jim had discovered the fascination that the distant view of the campus had for her, and the dread inspired by a suggestion that she should visit it.

"Some day I'll bring her over to return all your calls," he had told Nancy once. "Or else I'll persuade her to invite all the girls to come to her. Then the strange terrors will vanish, and she'll be perfectly well again. I shan't have to wait much longer, either, thanks to the good help I've had from you and her other Fair Oaks friends."

Somehow the Princess had discovered the very

day on which Nancy was once more free to come to her; and that afternoon she sent John across the gardens with a note. She wanted to consult all her Real Girls, she wrote, about "something nice and rather important." And she wanted,—oh, most dreadfully,—to see Timmy. "Dr. Jim says he's a dear little fellow," she explained, "so couldn't you bring him over to-day? If he's restless, one of my maids can wheel him about the grounds while we talk."

"Plain that she doesn't know Timmy," sniffed Mary Smith, when Nancy read that part of the note aloud. "We'll take along a piece of wrapping paper and one block, and he'll amuse himself all the time we're there, like an angel."

"That's because he's a normal child," explained Nancy wisely. "Dr. Jim's nurse said that all well children are quiet and good. Perhaps the Princess doesn't know about normal children."

Lloyd Mallory sighed. "It would be such fun to spoil him by playing with him all the time, as we did at first. But of course we mustn't, now that we know better."

"We must just see that he's all right and no pins pricking him," contributed little Sarah, who was proudly wheeling Timmy in his new perambulator.

Lloyd had received curt permission from home to "spend her money as she liked, and additional

cheque enclosed"; and a beautiful new perambulator and a high chair for Timmy were the visible results.

Unlike most angel-children when taken out to make a call, Timmy justified the highest hopes of his friends. He smiled joyously when the Princess kissed him. He gurgled more joyously when little Sarah helped him to pat Prince Charming's soft fur. He noisily begged "Na"—his latest name for Nancy—to take off his bonnet. Then he dropped down on a rug that the Princess had ordered spread for him on the piazza floor, and wrapped and unwrapped the one wooden block with a sweet patience and a dogged persistency that argued great things for his future.

Meanwhile the girls plied Mrs. Barton with tales of his brightness, his tractability, and his dear, cunning ways, until Plain Mary suddenly remembered that they couldn't stay much longer, and that the Princess had sent for them to talk about a mysterious something vaguely but enticingly described as "nice and rather important."

"Oh, yes!" said the Princess, when Mary reminded her. "It's the fairy party. You know I almost promised—or at least little Sarah wanted ——"

"Oh, but Sarah didn't mean to ask you to have a party," apologized Nancy hastily. "And be-

sides, you did have one for us,—a perfectly lovely one too,—to celebrate Prince Charming's birthday. You mustn't try to have another."

"But I want to!" cried the little Princess, exactly like a disappointed child, when somebody has unexpectedly threatened to deprive her of a promised treat. "Oh, indeed I want to! Don't you want to come?"

"Of course we do," chorused the Real Girls.

"Is it going to be for just us?" demanded little Sarah. "'Cause I did wish most awfully that some other girls could have seen how cunning Prince Charming looked, sitting in his cake-box. And maybe fairies would look even cunninger."

"I hope you'll like my fairies, Sarah," laughed the Princess. "And this time I thought—Dr. Jim wants—oh, I'm almost afraid to tell you, but Dr. Jim says I'm to ask every single girl in Fair Oaks School. And of course I want to please him," ended the Princess, with a half-wistful, altogether-happy smile.

"Oh, how perfectly splendid!" cried little Sarah, dancing over to hug the Princess, and then stooping to hug Timmy, because he was smiling up at her so ingratiatingly. "And is Timmy to come too?"

"Sarah!" reproved Nancy. "Of course he's much too little to come."

"It would overexcite him," explained Lloyd learnedly, "just as his naming party did."

"Why, he doesn't even know about fairies yet," added Plain Mary practically. "He wouldn't understand a single thing he saw."

"Oh, no, so he wouldn't!" Sarah was satisfied at last. "He doesn't even know you're a Princess, and that he"—she pointed to Prince Charming, who was watching that curious little person called Timmy from a safe distance—"is a Prince. Of course Timmy couldn't come. 'Scuse me for interrupting, Mrs. Barton. Were you going to tell us more about the fairies that will be at the party?"

"No," smiled the Princess, "I wasn't. I was going to keep them all for a grand surprise. Only,"—turning to the older girls,—"when you deliver my invitation will you explain that I'm not stupidly asking young ladies to a children's party? I mean, it's to be a fairy party for children of all ages, including grown-ups, because I want the teachers to come and watch. Miss Lawson ——" the Princess hesitated and her sensitive lips quivered. "She was a friend of my own little girl, you know. I haven't forgotten that she's a full-fledged young lady by this time. I hope she will want to come."

"She will be delighted to know that you've

specially asked her," said Nancy gently. "Will Dr. Jim be here for the party?"

"Oh, yes," answered the little Princess, all smiles again. "He's to be one of—one of the principal attractions. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you the date of the party. If Miss Marshall is willing, it's to be next Friday. Friday is rather the best day for Dr. Jim."

There was no girl at Fair Oaks too grown-up or too sophisticated to be excited about Mrs. Barton's party. Vera's beautiful eyes filled with tears when Nancy repeated the Princess's message; for even Vera had a heart, if one could but penetrate to it through the crust of thoughtless selfishness that covered her better feelings; and she had been genuinely fond of little Alice Barton.

"Vera Lawson says that she's quite crazy about the fairy party." Thus the word went forth, and the lackadaisical Fashion Plates and the sentimental Vera-ites obeyed its implied command and grew enthusiastic over Mrs. Barton's invitation. As for Nancy, the Learned twins, Mary, Margaret, and Mildred, it was never necessary for them to cultivate enthusiasm. They were continually bubbling over with it.

The only possible drawback to the fairy party was the fact that it had nothing whatever to do with Timmy. And Timmy was so completely the

center of interest and activity at Fair Oaks that the most delightful festivity, if it excluded him, had somehow not quite the perfect flavor.

It was on the Tuesday before the party that Miss Marshall received her letter from the Missouri lawyer. It came in the five o'clock mail, and at dinner that night she read it aloud, as "something that, while it conveys absolutely no certain and definite information, is still of interest to us all, as the first return from our advertising, and as suggesting a possible clue to Timmy's parentage."

The lawyer wrote, he said, in a purely friendly spirit, to tell the lady who was advertising a baby so extensively in the state papers some facts which might or might not concern her, or rather the baby.

"Exactly ten months ago an unsuccessful attempt was made to kidnap the infant child of a wealthy citizen of Green Gap, a town twenty miles or so from this city. The kidnappers were evidently misinformed, and apparently they continued for some time to believe that a child they had stolen somewhere was the son of this wealthy Mr. Sefton. For months Mr. Sefton kept receiving letters from them, offering to return his little son, if he would pay the ransom demanded.

"I think it would be to your advantage to write

Mr. Sefton. It was a very curious case. An old servant was suspected of complicity with the kidnappers and, I believe, dismissed, although, as I have said, no harm whatever came to the Sefton child. Finally, for reasons never made public, the whole matter was suddenly hushed up. Having had no connection with the case save that of interested observer, I am writing to suggest the possibility of a connection between the child in your possession and the Sefton mystery."

"I should think it wasn't definite," murmured Jane Learned, when Miss Marshall had finished. "It's as negative and doubtful as a London fog. But it's interesting. Would you please read it over once more, Miss Marshall?"

After the second reading, Jane nodded with an air of satisfaction, and prepared to tabulate her conclusions for the benefit of her less astute acquaintance. "First definite fact: Somebody tried to steal a rich baby named Sefton. Second definite fact: they didn't do it. Third fact (somewhat hazy): they did steal, or thought they stole, some baby. Fourth fact (very hazy indeed): the baby they thought they stole may be Timmy."

"Then perhaps Timmy isn't a rich baby," said Margaret. "If his parents were rich, like those Seftons, wouldn't they have hired detectives to investigate? Then the detectives would have

come upon the Sefton case, and run down this very clue that has been sent to Miss Marshall."

"I never thought that Timmy was an awfully rich baby," said Mildred Wallace. "He's too—too sweet. Oh, dear! Some of you were rich babies, maybe. But you know what I mean. Timmy is—is——"

"Perfectly normal," Nancy Lee took her up. "He doesn't act as if he'd been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and then had it snatched away. But I suppose tramping with gypsies for ten months might have made him forget about the silver spoon, if he ever had it. That woman certainly 'treated him right,' even if she did think it was 'nuts to lug a heavy kid around.'"

"Suppose," suggested Jane, "that when Timmy Marshall's parents turn up, they turn up poor. They may, you know. We ought to hang on to Lloyd's money, in case a time ever comes when he needs things worse than he needed a 'pram' and a high chair."

"He can take those things home with him," said Lloyd hastily. "And I think father will give me more money if Timmy ever needs it."

"But we don't want you to do everything for Timmy," objected Margaret. "We all want a hand in looking out for him. Suppose his parents should 'turn up poor,' as Jane says, this summer,

when we're all separated, and some of us have left Fair Oaks School forever."

"Possibility number one," tabulated Jane: "Parents turn up poor. Possibility number two: they never turn up. That's two chances, out of a possible three, that we ought to be getting together a nest-egg for Timmy's future. Let's do it!"

"Let's! But how?"

"All subscribe."

"That won't be much of a nest-egg. Most of us can't hand around tremendous sums like Lloyd Mallory."

"Much as we'd like to!"

"Perhaps we could add to the subscription by giving some sort of entertainment. All the village would come."

"But the rest of the spring term is so busy!"

"Frightfully busy! There's exams ——"

"And Float Day ——"

"And the seniors' doings."

"And the fairy party."

"Well, if Miss Marshall is willing, let's take up the subscription anyhow," suggested Margaret. "Then we can be sure of a little nest-egg, at least. And if anybody ——"

"Has a regular inspiration about a grand money-making show," cut in Jane, "why, maybe we can tuck it in between times somewhere."

No inspiration had been announced, when, the next afternoon, Nancy Lee went by request to advise with the Princess about her approaching entertainment.

She was shown up-stairs to a sewing-room, where she found the Princess and three seamstresses fairly swimming in a sea of daintily tinted tarlatan,—rose-pink, daffodil-yellow, lily-white, and pale violet,—that lay piled in shimmering waves of color over chairs, tables, and sewing-machines.

"Isn't this pretty?" The Princess held up a yellow wave for Nancy's inspection. "I'm so glad you happen to have on a white dress, Nancy, because now you can slip on some of the flower-fairy costumes, and we can tell much better how to go on with them. I hated to let you into part of the mysteries, Nancy dear; but I found I must ask some one for a list of the girls' names, grouped by sizes, or rather by heights. Fairy robes haven't much fit except length, you see.

"I'm planning it this way, Nancy. When the girls come,—all in very plain white things, please tell them,—they are to go up-stairs at once to put on their costumes. There will be four rooms, one for the very little girls, one for the tallest, and two for the betweens. A maid will stand down-stairs with the lists of names for each room, and the costumers"—she waved at the busy seam-

tresses—"have promised to stay and help dress the fairies. Oh, you're a beautiful daffodil, Nancy!" She slipped a yellow cap over Nancy's golden hair, and held out a pair of yellow shoes for her to see. "I must tell them to be sure that you're a daffodil. Or should you prefer to be a rose? Or a violet? Or a tall white lily? Try them all! Isn't it fun making up flower-fairies, Nancy? Girls and flowers—the two loveliest things in the world—will make such a wonderful, wonderful party!"

Nancy tried being a rose, a lily, and a violet, and decided she preferred being a daffodil. She exclaimed over the wonderful ingenuity and beauty of all the costumes, and at the amount of trouble Mrs. Barton was taking.

"And you say this is only a part of the surprise," she added. "It's almost too bad that only you and the teachers will be there to see what pretty fairies we make,—and Dr. Jim."

Mrs. Barton nodded laughingly. "I'd thought of that. I believe I shall ask Mrs. Grant to come and look on. She loves girls almost as well as I do. How is the small boy—Timmy, do you call him?"

"Quite well, thank you, and we've had a clue about where he belongs,—or perhaps it's a clue." And Nancy retailed the contents of the Missouri

lawyer's letter, with its suggestion that Timmy was not necessarily a child of rich parents, as his kidnappers had believed. She also explained the girls' plan, approved by Miss Marshall, to take up a subscription for their baby.

"It's pretty small so far," lamented Nancy. "The girls are always poor at the end of a term, you see, and most of our fathers can't send us extra cheques in the lovely, absent-minded way that Lloyd's father does. He sent her another one to-day, because he couldn't be sure whether he sent one the last time he wrote to her. And it was for fifty dollars! But we're not going to let her give it all. We don't want any one person to do a lot more for Timmy than any one else can—at least not until we've tried to plan something that we can all help about." And Nancy explained how Fair Oaks was waiting impatiently for some one —probably it would be Jane Learned—to have an inspiration about an easily-arranged entertainment.

Mrs. Barton listened with deep interest. "You must let me subscribe some money," she said, "for that cunning child. And if you wanted to use my grounds for your entertainment—but the school campus is just as pretty. I agree with you that it does take a great deal of time to plan things so that they'll go off smoothly. We've had such fun

planning this party—Dr. Jim and I. I should never have had it if he hadn't kept thinking of such fascinating things to do. Yes, it takes time to plan, and more time to do the necessary work. If only —— Nancy!"

"Yes," said Nancy eagerly. It was quite evident that the Princess had had what Jane was most wont to describe as an inspiration.

"Nancy, would the girls like to have their fairy party turned into an entertainment for Timmy? Because it would be quite simple. I should only need to ask a hundred or so friends, like the Grants, to come and look on at the flower frolic—and to visit the lair of the Dr. —— Oh, I mustn't tell you all the secrets, or your fun will be spoiled! And I specially want you to like my party—you and Sarah and Lloyd, who are my dearest girls."

"Oh, Mrs. Barton, could we really have it that way?" demanded Nancy eagerly. "Could we really have the party and the entertainment both—together? And do you know a hundred people whom you could ask to come and watch?"

The Princess considered. "I used to know a great many rich and generous people," she said gravely, "and just lately I've been going about a little again. Oh, yes, I'm sure I can ask at least a hundred who will love to come—and love to help Timmy, when we've told them about him. The only

extra trouble will be writing the notes, and I can easily arrange for that to be done. And you'll send me the lists of assorted heights to-morrow? The littlest ones are to be crocuses and snowdrops. See?" The Princess held up a golden-yellow, sheath-shaped dress, with a little tight yellow cap to match. "That's for Sarah. And you'll write me what they all think about turning the party into an entertainment,—especially Miss Marshall's opinion."

"Yes," promised Nancy. "But I just know they'll all want it that way." And she rushed off to tell the rest that the fairy party had now achieved perfection, since it was to be a benefit for Timmy.

Three days later, just as dusk was settling over the gardens of the Enchanted Castle, which gleamed with light at every window, a great company of giant moths, wonderfully colored,—or were they gay tropical birds?—flitted out of the Castle and down the hill to a secluded part of the Castle grounds, where the tall hedgerows and quaintly clipped yews shut in a square of velvety green lawn. There, directed by a slender yellow moth, the shapes settled down, singly or in groups, according to some preconceived plan; and when they were still, it was plain that they were neither gay moths nor tropical birds, but Flowers—spring

Flowers, bigger and more beautiful than any in the Princess's spring garden on the south slope of the hill.

The Flowers were no sooner arranged in their beds, than a crowd of people headed by the Princess,—looking very young and pretty in a filmy white gown, instead of the somber black she always wore,—trooped out of the Castle, and came down to view the new garden that had blossomed magically between the hedges. As the Princess approached each bed, the Flowers nodded and bowed, and the Lilies rang silvery bells.

Then, as it grew darker, little starry lights twinkled out in the trees, and a round yellow moon flashed forth in the hedge.

At the same time soft music, hidden somewhere up on the hill, woke the Flower-Fairies into life. They nodded and bowed, this time to one another; and then, as the hidden music swept into a rippling waltz-tune, they began to dance. Pink Roses darted to the lily-bed for partners; tall Daffodils chose little Crocuses; and in the light of the tiny, twinkling stars and the funny round moon they danced and danced, while the audience, sitting in a semicircle at the foot of the hill, applauded, and cried out delightedly for more.

Finally the waltz strain wavered and died away, and the dancers stopped and stood expectant, know-

ing only that this was a signal for one of the Princess's promised "surprises." Then, out of a big brown tree-trunk,—that looked real enough in the mock moonlight, but was only pasteboard and opened like a door,—glided a figure in a shimmering brown-green dress. A Dryad, of course, she was, coming out of her tree to sport with the Flower-Fairies. The music changed again, and the lovely Wood-nymph, standing among the Flowers, sang—first a dainty song of fairy-land, then a rollicking woodland ditty, then, as she glided slowly back toward her tree, a child's lullaby. The Flower-Fairies exclaimed at the loveliness of this surprise, and at the glorious beauty of the Dryad's music; while the audience exchanged amazed whispers and thrilled glances, for some of them recognized the Wood-nymph as one of the greatest sopranos of her day.

"Just like Marion Barton!" Mrs. Grant whispered to her husband. "Spending a small fortune just to amuse some girls!"

When they were sure that the Dryad had gone into her tree to stay, the Flower-Fairies, summoned by the guiding Daffodil, whose hair was almost as yellow as her cap, glided off to the very end of the hedged enclosure. The moon went too—convenient moon!—and established herself in the crotch of an elm tree, where she could shine right

down on a queer brown canvas cave, with "Dragon's Lair" written above it, in scrawly, curly brown letters,—"exactly like dragons' tails," a tall spindly Lily announced audibly. The audience flocked after the Flowers and arrived in time to see the Dragon, shiny and scaly, with fire in his eyes and smoke coming out of his mouth, mixed with horrible roars, appear in the door of his cave.

Some of the small Crocuses ran back, shrieking; but the taller Flowers went close to the cave-mouth, and daringly obeyed the Dragon's growled instructions to put their hands into his claws and receive souvenirs, mystically called "sparks from the Dragon-fire." These they were to light at the candles that burned by the cave's mouth; and soon Dragon and Fairies were standing in a rain of bright, harmless sparks that sputtered out mysteriously from the little black sticks that the Dragon had bestowed upon all the "good fairies." By this time the little Crocuses had received whispered reassurances from a friendly yellow Daffodil, to the effect that the Dragon was only Dr. Jim—Mary's Dr. Jim—dressed up in funny clothes, and had stopped wishing to run away. And when the Dragon burst out of his cave and ran, roaring and smoking, among the Flowers, little Crocuses and Snowdrops danced jeeringly around him with the rest, and, when he broke away and

ran up the hill, they joined with the taller Fairies in hot pursuit.

"Oh, wasn't it all fun!" said Nancy Daffodil to Lily Jane, as they sat, an hour later, eating most delicious ices on the Castle piazza.

They had met the Bad Fairy and made her promise to be Good. A Gnome had sprung out of the hillside, and he and the Dryad had sung a marvelous duet, which, the material Mrs. Grant estimated, had "added another small fortune to Marion's atrocious expenditures." Finally they had all come up to the Castle for supper and after that there was to be dancing in the Castle ballroom, whose polished floor, strange to say, the Flower-Fairies preferred to even the most velvety greensward for their sprightly gambols.

"Well, here you are at last!" said a deep voice above Nancy's nodding cap, and she looked up to see Dr. Jim, in immaculate evening dress, smiling down at his two friends. "It's very difficult," he explained, "to pick out anybody you know at a fairy masquerade."

"Where's the Dragon?" asked Nancy, moving to make room for the doctor.

"Dead," said Dr. Jim solemnly. "Poor fellow, his exertions were too much for him! With one last gasp he shed his iridescent covering,—that weighs a ton and would furnish ample protection

against an Arctic winter—and he is now no more. I mourn him, but I cannot blame him, can you?"

"Conversation is better than roars any day," announced Jane decisively. "I kept thinking of all the jokes you must be wanting to make, only Dragons aren't supposed to talk English."

"Well, now you can tell us about the puppy," interposed Nancy eagerly. "Or haven't you got him yet?"

Dr. Jim smiled grimly. "I bought him day before yesterday, Miss Nancy, and up to date I should characterize him chiefly as expensive, both to buy and to maintain. He's a thoroughbred English bull. When buying a puppy, it would seem to be economy to get the best; and I did so, or tried to. I took him home while I got my bag and met my boy, and in half an hour he'd chewed up a new pair of driving-gloves, and one patent-leather pump, and pretty well finished a Persian rug. On the train he playfully bit a baggageman, whose injured feelings came very high. On the drive out to the farm, he killed a chicken, claimed by its owner to be as thoroughbred as the pup. Then I formally presented him to Rob, and I must admit, Miss Nancy, that the price of that dog, everything included, was very little to pay for the way the boy's eyes shone. May I ask, Miss

Daffodil, how you guessed that he'd always wanted a puppy of his own and never had one?"

Nancy flushed at the swiftly aimed question. "I didn't guess, Dr. Jim. I only thought—at least my brother Dick seems to think that any boy loves a nice dog. What's Rob's dog's name, Dr. Jim?"

"Commander. I tried to have the boy come up here with me for the party, but he wouldn't leave Commander." Dr. Jim chuckled. "I fancy it's as well he didn't. The other farm animals are old and staid, and my staid old caretaker wouldn't have appreciated the privilege of looking after Commander."

Jane was just going to ask if Rob's last name had yet been discovered, when Mrs. Barton came for Nancy.

"Now is the time to tell them about Timmy," she explained, "while they're all sitting quietly in the ballroom, over their coffee. And Miss Marshall thinks you are the one to speak."

"I!" demurred Nancy. "Oh, I couldn't! I shouldn't know how! Miss Marshall—or Dr. Jim —or you ——"

"But you found him," protested the Princess.

"And you love him a little better than any one else of us," added Jane.

"And you certainly have pluck enough to tell a

few friends the simple tale of your and Timmy's adventures," Dr. Jim assured her, with his compelling smile. "Come on, Miss Nancy Daffodil! Come on, Miss Jane! We'll stand by you."

"Well, if Miss Marshall said I was to, I suppose I must," said Nancy despairingly, rising and smoothing down her fluffy dress.

There had been no fixed admission price to the Fairy entertainment; but the audience, who had been duly warned what to expect, listened to Nancy's halting, earnest little speech, that struck home because of its spontaneous fervor, lightened by its spontaneous fun, and decided that the evening had been worth to them, collectively, six hundred and fifty-nine dollars and eight cents—"for Timmy." Nancy had briefly explained the uncertainty that existed about Timmy's circumstances in life, adding that, if he proved not to need financial aid, all donations made for him would be used to help some other needy baby; "the nicest we can find, though of course he won't come up to Timmy."

The audience applauded this suggestion, which had been broached to them in the Princess's notes of invitation; and one friendly gentleman started a cheer "for the finest baby," under cover of which Nancy, blushing furiously, sat down.

"I hope they gave as much as they would if

Dr. Jim or Miss Marshall had asked them," Nancy wrote in the Red Journal that night. "And I hope I shall never have to work any harder to do what I've set out to than I worked to make my feet carry me up to that platform, after Dr. Jim had got them quiet and told them that I would speak to them. Frightened feet are the silliest things! They stick and drag and stumble. But perhaps, if the frightened feeling bothers your feet a lot, it doesn't bother your head so much. I remembered to say most of what I think counted, and anyhow six hundred and fifty-nine dollars and eight cents is a lot of money. If Timmy never needs it, there are plenty of babies that do.

"I'm awfully tired. I wish I could see Commander. Rob must be a nice boy. I ——"

Here the pencil fell out of Nancy's sleepy fingers.

CHAPTER XV

FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE

JANE LEARNED sat on the edge of the boat-house wharf, eliciting alarmed shrieks from Christina by the careless fashion in which she dangled her best new pumps over the water, and conversing amiably with Nancy Lee and Grace Allen. Nancy was waiting for the Blues to finish with their boat, which would then be available for the Red Sub team's use; and Grace had a tennis engagement with Plain Mary, who had been delayed for a moment by a conference with Miss Dutton on the subject of chaperonage for an impending visit of the Ogre. All four of the W. W.'s, being dressed for a more or less athletic afternoon, wore their "featured" jumpers.

"I've been thinking about the W. W.'s," said Jane, idly dipping a pump-toe in water, by way of demonstrating to Christina that the shoe would not fall off easily. "I think we ought to be up and doing—or make people think we are, anyway. And for up-and-doing-ness the Woodland Wanderers is too—oh, too poetical and lackadaisical a name."

"I think it's pretty," objected Nancy, from her perch on the wharf railing.

"Sure it's pretty," assented Jane. "That's why we took it. But the well-known trouble with prettiness is that it's only skin-deep, and soon palls. So, having experienced prettiness and learned its limitations, and been very nearly guessed by that literary and poetical Carlene Marbury, let's exercise the feminine privilege of changing our minds—and our name."

"To what, Jane?" inquired conservative Grace Allen.

"Don't ask her, Grace," said Christina, who was unwontedly irritated by Jane's lack of consideration for her new shoes. "She doesn't know to what. She talks first, and then she thinks. Yes, you do, Jane!"

"Um—maybe," said Jane, rescuing her almost-escaped slipper with a jerk, and curling her feet under her by way of propitiating Christina, whose mood appeared to be really hostile. "But that's not so bad as never thinking, like most people," went on Jane calmly. "What I really do, Christina, is to think and talk simultaneously. When my thoughts get behind in the race, I invent pleasant digressions, to enable them to catch up. During the one I've just made, I've thought of a nice new meaning for W. W.—pretty but not too pretty. We'll be the Wonder Workers."

"That is rather pretty," agreed Nancy critic-

ally, while Christina, mollified by Jane's posture, beamed delightedly at her clever twin.

"Yes, but what does it really mean?" demanded Grace Allen.

Jane regarded the unsympathetic and unimaginative Grace through half-closed, quizzical eyes. "Anything—or nothing," she said calmly. "It means one thing to me, and another, I presume, to you. For instance: to both Nancy and me, it might suggest slenderness and ogres; and to Nancy alone, speeches that you hate to make, to get money for Timmy; and to the gentle Christina it might suggest successful tussles with binomial theorem. In other words, we all work some sort of wonders—or we ought to, if we amount to anything—and the point of the newly named W. W.'s is that we shall work some good ones together. Grace is hereby nominated to plan the first of the grand series. Good-bye, everybody! I'm off on a hike with Miss MacPherson."

"Not in those shoes, Jane!" shrieked Christina, after the striding figure.

Grace, having declared, as she had innumerable times before, that she couldn't understand Jane's explanations,—they were far worse than none at all,—went off to her tennis; and Christina and Nancy continued to watch the Blues' boat.

"We must remember to tell Margaret and Sarah

and Jeanne about the new name," said Christina. "It will be splendid exercise for my French, trying to translate Jane's explanation about Wonder Workers. By the way, Nancy, do you know what's the trouble between Jeanne and Vera Lawson? Vera told Kittie that they weren't chums any longer, and Jeanne stares at Vera all through meals with an awfully hurt look on her face."

"No, I don't know," said Nancy. "That is, I hadn't even noticed that they weren't as good friends as ever. Between Timmy, and the Sub Crew, and lessons, I'm too busy to notice anything. But if they have quarreled, I think I know ——" Nancy broke off suddenly to ask a question. "Christina, did you ever hear any of the girls speak of Jeanne's home or family or anything?"

Christina shook her head. "No, never. Oh, yes, Kittie Westervelt did grumble once that Vera Lawson knew all about it and wouldn't tell her, and that Jeanne never would talk of her life in France to any one but Vera. Didn't Jeanne ever tell you about it?"

"Ye-es," began Nancy doubtfully. She had never mentioned Jeanne's account of her joke on Vera, nor had she spoken of the facts behind it; partly because she had hardly thought of the matter again, and partly because she wanted to leave Jeanne free to make her own explanation to Vera

in her own good time. And now, when Vera had probably received the explanation with resentment and broken off with Jeanne in consequence, Nancy did not wish to be the one to make the cause of the trouble public. So she was not sorry that, just as she had begun to answer Christina's question, somebody should come quickly down the steps to the wharf. It was Vera Lawson herself, in a filmy white dress and a flapping, flower-trimmed hat. In one hand she carried a new novel, in the other a gaily striped parasol—Kittie Westervelt's mother had brought it to her daughter from Naples and it had won Vera's instant approval, unfortunately for poor Kittie. At sight of Christina and Nancy, Vera turned away abruptly and walked to the other end of the little landing, where she stood in silence, with her back to the two girls. They exchanged glances, Christina's tinged with dismay and Nancy's with amusement.

"What's the matter?" Nancy signaled in the convenient finger-alphabet, beloved of all schoolgirls.

Christina shook her head dolefully. None of Vera's misdeeds had ever quite uprooted Christina's early adoration of the lovely, smiling, wonderfully clothed and beautifully mannered school idol; and this cut direct hurt her, in spite of its absurdity.

Nancy shrugged and stood up. "Going canoeing, Vera?" she asked. "Shall I get out a boat for you?"

"No, thank you," said Vera icily. "I thought Mary Smith was down here. I prefer to wait for her."

"Why, I think she's playing tennis," said Christina. "Didn't she go off with Grace, Nancy?"

Nancy nodded. "She said she was canoeing to-morrow."

"Then I've evidently mixed my engagement book," said Vera, moving with lofty serenity toward the steps.

"Please let me take you out, Vera," begged Christina. "I should love to. I'm just hanging around watching the crew-practice."

"Thank you," said Vera icily, "but I don't care to go out to-day." And she swept up the steps with her most queenly air.

Christina's lips quivered like a hurt child's.

"Don't!" said Nancy comfortingly. "Don't care so! She's not worth minding. But I should certainly like to know what we've done to offend her."

"It's probably Jane," said Christina wearily. "She's always playing tricks, and Vera hates to have people joke her. Of course I don't exactly

blame Jane, after the way Vera acted that time last fall, but still I—I——"

"You hate fusses," put in Nancy swiftly. "So do I. I also hate being snubbed for what I don't even know about. Even if Jane has done something, that's no reason why Vera should snub you and me. Even twinny twins are two separate persons, and Vera ought to know it."

But Jane, upon being sternly arraigned by Nancy, on her return from the afternoon's hike, disclaimed being at the bottom of Vera's strange behavior.

"Why, I've hardly seen her lately," averred Jane. "So it couldn't have been one of my unconscious 'lapses,' as poor Christina calls 'em. No, for once I'm not guilty. We must inquire into this."

Jane's inquiry, however, proved as futile as Nancy's arraignment of Jane. "Something is the matter with Vera," all her friends said vaguely; but nobody knew why that undefined "something," that made Vera distant and moody and unusually dictatorial, even for her, should cause her to be positively rude to Nancy and the Learned twins. Jane and Nancy scorned to ask Vera herself what grudge she bore them; and Christina was afraid to do it. She tried to get Kittie Westervelt, who was now one of Vera's chief intimates,

to find out for her; but Kittie, after one attempt, tearfully refused to do anything more. "It's no use asking Vera anything nowadays," she declared. "She's terribly nervous—over leaving school, I suppose, and going out into society, where she'll see that man—the one she loves. When I asked her if she didn't mean to put down a subscription for Timmy, she almost snapped my head off, and when I asked her about you ——" Kittie gulped, winked hard, and gesticulated her inability to put Vera's cruel treatment of her into words.

As for poor Jeanne, she went about with consternation in her heart and fear in her wistful brown eyes. Learning "ze ways *Americaines*" was surely hard work. If many of her pupils were like Vera Lawson, teaching "the American misses" would be still harder. Why did one read and hear so much of American humor? No French girl, Jeanne felt sure, would have failed so completely as Vera Lawson had to appreciate Jeanne's stupid little joke. Jeanne had never laughed at Vera. She had shielded her from the laughter of the other girls by refusing to talk of her home life with any one else, excepting only her one trusted confidant, Nancy Lee. And Vera, —why Jeanne did not know,—had never repeated her own glowing inventions centering around the marvelous château in Brittany. But when,

sweetly, patiently, and humbly, Jeanne had confessed that there had been a joke, and that it had gone far enough,—perhaps too far, Vera had listened, asked a few cold, incisive questions, and told Jeanne in swift, angry words that the poor child could not half comprehend that she—Vera Lawson—wished never to speak to her again.

Perhaps she deserved to be treated like that, Jeanne thought. Perhaps it was one of "ze ways *Americaines.*" But Nancy Lee hadn't seemed to feel so about the joke. Jeanne longed to talk again with Nancy, and resolved to confide in her at the first opportunity. But, as Nancy had told Christina, she flew so busily about between regular school-work, crew-practice, the elective in baby-tending, and the plans for Timmy's future, that Jeanne, naturally timid and now quite subdued by Vera's unkindness, could not break through the charmed circle of Nancy's happy activity, bitterly though she longed to; while Nancy, for her part, never guessed that the wistful look in Jeanne's eyes was seeking an answer to its perplexed questioning from her.

When the release bell rang, on the night of Jane's discussion of the W. W.'s destinies, Grace Allen dropped her books with a promptness that she might have copied from the volatile Nancy.

"Nancy,"—she intercepted her roommate's hasty progress toward the hall,—"could you wait just a minute? I want to ask you about something."

"Of course." Nancy dropped down comfortably on the broad window-seat.

"It's about Lloyd Mallory," Grace went on. "I've noticed her a good deal lately, because"—Grace flushed a little—"she's another one like me, who doesn't make many friends; and she hasn't a jolly roommate, Nancy, like you, to bring her into the fun."

Nancy smiled reminiscently, remembering how, on their first evening at Fair Oaks, Kittie had tried to effect an exchange of roommates, whereby Grace and Lloyd were to be together. "I'm afraid Kittie hasn't looked out for Lloyd much," she agreed aloud. "And Lloyd certainly doesn't know how to join in with the rest of us. She says she never learned how to play at all till she came here."

"And now she's going home again for a long, maybe a lonesome summer, without learning very much about it," said Grace. "So I thought if we could make her feel, just at the last, that we liked her—because I really think the girls do like and admire Lloyd in spite of her queerness—why, it would be something pleasant for her to remember during the summer, and if she comes back next

year it would give her a good start. There's everything in feeling that people like you," concluded poor Grace solemnly.

"What a grand thought!" cried enthusiastic Nancy. "And I know the very thing to do to make Lloyd feel that way. Her birthday is next week—the second of June. She's never had a birthday party—not since she was a very small child, I mean. We—you can give her one." Nancy hesitated, remembering Grace's sensitiveness. "Did you want to do something all by yourself, Grace, or may some of the rest of us help a little?"

"Of course you may. Indeed I wanted to ask you if you thought the others—specially you and the twins—would approve of the idea, and help to carry it out."

Nancy's face lighted suddenly. "How stupid I am! This is the first scheme for the W. W.'s—the one Jane nominated you to think of. Of course it is! Don't tell me again that you can't see through Jane's queer notions, Grace, because this lovely plan proves that you can understand her splendidly. Making Lloyd Mallory feel that we like her is exactly the kind of 'wonder-working' that Jane meant. Only I'm sure no one but you would have thought of so useful a wonder for us to work."

In dazed silence Grace stared at her roommate. "Oh!" she said finally. "I begin to see. By wonders Jane meant doing hard things that will benefit some one—like your making that speech for Timmy, and Christina's learning algebra to keep up the standard of the school, so that Timmy can stay on here. She said something about ogres and slenderness, but I suppose that was just nonsense, like the Frabjous Tortoise that she's always promising to show us. And now you mean that making Lloyd Mallory feel popular will be hard and will be a benefit to her; therefore it's suitable work for the W. W.'s."

"Certainly," agreed Nancy. "And I also mean that you've been a lot quicker than I should have been in thinking up just the right thing. Come and tell the twins."

"Yes," said Grace, "let's go and find the twins. But let's not tell them, please, that I never so much as thought of the W. W.'s till you mentioned them just now. I was thinking of—of—friendship, Nancy," she ended shyly.

"Oh!" said Nancy, stricken dumb in her turn. "Well, this time, Grace," she added, after a pause, "you're certainly thinking straight."

And so it happened that Lloyd Mallory's seventeenth birthday was celebrated with the conventional cake, candles, and presents, and with much

altogether unconventional hilarity and good cheer. It was a picnic party—Nancy insisted upon that, because Lloyd delighted so in picnics. June second fell on a Tuesday. Miss Marshall, who was elected an honorary W. W. and taken into the secret of the first Wonder, reluctantly decided that it would not do to break into the week with so extended an excursion as one to Lloyd's adored wood at "Seldom Inn." But she suggested instead a sunset water-party, with a canoe trip to the other end of the lake and a picnic supper on Sunset Hill, where the woods were open enough to make a fire at once safe and possible.

Lloyd was speechless with amazement when she discovered that it was, as little Sarah said, her "very own party" that the school was joining in so heartily. She was even more astonished when Nancy whispered to her that Grace had thought of it first. For a while she shrank from taking her proper place at the center of the stage; but, as the girls kindly but firmly refused to let her slip into her accustomed obscurity, as one after another presented her with a comical gift,—when Mary Ann ostentatiously informed her that Cook had "really injyed bakin' a cake for her," when Miss Dutton dragged her to the seat of honor at supper, and Jane Learned toasted her in witty speech,—Lloyd lost her awkward shyness, and expanded

into the gracious, capable young woman of whom Fair Oaks had caught fleeting glimpses before. Crises, like the rescue of Kittie or the immediate necessity of making a garden, had brought Lloyd out before; now appreciation and affection made her blossom even more charmingly, in a way that astonished no one so much as Lloyd herself.

"It hasn't been a wasted year after all," she told herself happily. "I haven't been all on the outside of things. Pete and the boys will be pretty well pleased when they hear about to-night. Oh, I'm glad I came here—glad all through! I wonder when Ginger's birthday is, and Pete's. We'll have some splendid parties this summer up in Painted Gorge. I must think what kind of party Ginger would like best, and Pete. Pete doesn't know how to play any better than I do. But I'll show him! I've learned a little about playing so far, and next year I'm coming back to learn more. I want to live a big, splendid, full life, and that means knowing all sorts of things—how to play, and Ancient History, and Art, and Current Events, and how to walk across a room, and French ——"

Lloyd's happy revery was broken in upon by the sight of Jeanne Durand's wistful face, as a wandering gleam of firelight threw it into pale relief against the darkness. Jeanne was sitting a little

outside the merry circle, whose gay chatter she was too depressed even to try to follow.

"I'm glad I'm not learning French over in France," Lloyd thought, appreciating Jeanne's overpowering sense of aloofness from the gaiety around her as no other girl in the circle could. Inventing an excuse to change her seat, Lloyd went over to Jeanne, and in halting French began to tell her how the fire and the darkness reminded her of home—of long, hard rides after lost cattle, of evenings when the horses gave out and they had to camp in the open, and of the night she spent in Painted Gorge, alone with Ginger and the ghost of Old Man Dawson, with not even a fire to cheer and warm her. "We never picnic for fun out there," ended Lloyd, "but we're going to, now that I've learned how. Do you have picnics in France, Jeanne?"

The little foreigner, who had listened breathlessly to Lloyd's story, shook her head. "Nothing like this; only rustic fêtes—very civil—no, very civilized, I mean to say. Please tell me more of your far-off home, Mademoiselle Lloyd."

"Yes, do!" begged the others, who had been listening as eagerly as Jeanne. "But speak English now. It's our turn."

"And I shall try to understand also," said Jeanne, slipping her thin little hand into Lloyd's

big brown one under cover of the dark, as if to say that she understood why Lloyd, the heroine of the hour, had come to sit beside her and talk to her of things far away and strange.

So Lloyd told how Burnt Fork was "shot up" the night she and her father and Pete rode in from a visit to one of their outlying ranches; how Pete had mastered four outlaws single-handed down in the bad lands; and how she had helped Pete and the rest to fight the big fire that gave Burnt Fork its name.

"I've talked too much," she declared finally, with a sudden return of her habitual shyness. "And I'm sure it's time to go home."

Everybody laughed at that, and Lloyd had to stand much good-natured chaffing over her anxiety to have her "very own party" ended. But unfortunately it was time to go home. Under cover of the darkness and the confusion of departure, Lloyd turned again to Jeanne.

"Don't be discouraged," she whispered. "We're both strangers to all this sort of thing, and it's hard for us to get along here. But I've stayed a whole year, and I'm glad I stuck it out. You'll be glad too, some day."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you comfort me," said Jeanne softly. "I see you understand how difficult it is to learn the strange new ways."

And then and there was cemented a friendship between the Western heiress and the fatherless little French girl, that was to mean much to them both in days to come.

"The best point about Wonders," said Jane Learned that night to Christina, "is that one Wonder makes another. Lloyd, being chirked up herself, went and chirked up poor Jeanne, as we ought to have done, since she's our waif; only we couldn't or didn't. The two of them came up from the wharf arm in arm, like real old pals."

"Pals is slang, Jane," reproved Christina severely. "But wasn't it all a nice Wonder? And the most wonderful Wonder is that Grace Allen thought of it."

"So the friendship motto worked all right in the end," Nancy confided hastily to the Red Journal. "And I have hopes that mine is going to work better, since I've realized how many things you have to think about when you 'set out to do' something. So far I've been as regular at Sub Crew practice as I set out to be, and to-day Billy thanked me, and said she was proud of the Subs—dear old Billy!

"They've made me treasurer of Timmy's money. I'm awfully scared, but Miss Dutton has promised to go to the bank with me and explain things. She and Miss Marshall and Miss Cripps are the

trustees of the fund. I feel pretty proud, I can tell you, Red Journal, to be treasurer of such lots of money. 'Pride goeth before a fall' is an improving quotation that I always did hate. I hope it isn't going to happen to me now.

"N. B. Only two more chances to get red circles this term, N. Lee. So keep trying."

CHAPTER XVI

A RACE AND A ROBBERY

ANOTHER exciting day! But all days seemed to be exciting just at present, Nancy reflected happily. This one was the annual Fair Oaks Float Day, with the Red-Blue race in the afternoon, the Canoe Procession from sunset to dusk, and after that music, and fireworks from across the lake. As a crowning feature, the Ogre was coming,—he happened opportunely to be spending a few days at the village inn,—and as usual Plain Mary, whose estimate of her own charms was very humble, had invited Jane and Nancy to help entertain him.

In spite of valiant efforts to keep her mind on lessons, Nancy found herself smiling delightedly in algebra class when the rather watery sunshine of early morning settled into a steady glow that augured well for a really pleasant day; counting the hours she had spent with the "Subs," in the midst of "Current Events" class; and blessing Miss Cripps for her humanity in assigning "Why I Think the ——— Crew Will Win," as the topic for a ten-minute written exercise in argument. Needless to say, Nancy wrote "Red" in the space dispassion-

ately left blank by Miss Cripps; and for once her ideas drove her fountain-pen over the paper at top speed. Of course the Reds would win; Nancy knew dozens of good reasons why they not only would, but must; beginning with the excellent new stroke they were using, and ending with Billy's wonderful management of her "men." Nancy forebore to mention the value of the stiff practice-races that the Red Subs had furnished for their crew; it was a pity to leave out so clinching an argument, but modesty forbade her to include it.

Float Day was a half-holiday. After lunch Nancy wandered over to the Senior House to speak a last word of cheer to Billy, who, like most wonderful managers, needed an outlet in her moments of depression, and had found the cheery little Sub-captain very useful in that capacity. But Billy was lying flat on the floor in her darkened room, resting for the greatest hour of her year; and Vera Lawson, sitting on guard in their study, chose to forget Billy's instructions to the effect that the Sub-captain (and nobody else) might come in for a minute. So, feeling just a little hurt, and realizing suddenly that, after all, a Sub is only a Sub, and that her hours of faithful practice had not won back the coveted seat in the good ship "Invincible" that earlier carelessness had lost her, Nancy walked slowly back to the dormitory.

In her study she found Jane and Christina, Plain Mary, and Alice Borden, impatiently awaiting her.

"We've collected the Timmy-subscriptions," explained Jane. "We didn't dare to wait later than the first week of the month, for fear the girls would use up their allowances; and we thought this afternoon would be a good time to collect, because most people are in their rooms fixing up for the festivities."

"It's all there but ninety-six cents," added Alice Borden.

"Our sixty-six," put in Christina, "and your thirty. Ours is spent, but we've written home to borrow it. We think they'll be willing to advance it to us out of next month's allowance, as it's for Timmy."

"Besides," added Jane, "we offered to work it out, if preferred, at bargain rates. A week's dusting, ten cents; Thursday night suppers, when the cook is out, ten cents per; and other services in proportion."

"Mrs. Barton still has the money from the party," put in Plain Mary. "Dr. Jim said yesterday to tell you that it was 'yours to command,' but I forgot."

As they talked, the collectors had poured into Nancy's lap a miscellaneous mass of coppers, silver,

and small bills, amounting, according to their calculations, to forty-nine dollars and sixty-nine cents.

"But you'd better count it," advised Christina, "because I'm very poor at making change. I'm sure I got all she'd promised from each girl, and maybe I got more."

"You can't bank it till to-morrow," said practical Alice. "But it will be all right. Miss Marshall will keep it over night in her safe, if you like."

"And the school store will be glad to change that 'chicken-feed' into bills," suggested Jane. "Count it out, Nancy, and I'll take it down for you. I'm not going to doll up for the party-doings, you see—never do, as it's against my well-known principles. So I have loads of time."

Nancy and Jane carefully counted all the small change in the pile, and while Nancy counted and sorted her bills, Jane went to the school store to exchange a tea-tray full of coin for something less cumbrous.

She was away for some time on her mission. Nancy piled the bills neatly, and, fastening them with an elastic band, began to dress for the afternoon. She had smoothed her yellow hair, and was deciding anxiously between a blue dimity and a dressier white linen, which would be just the thing if only it didn't need pressing, when somebody knocked

on the study-door. It wasn't Jane; Jane didn't knock and wait; she banged and walked in. Grace, who objected to interruptions while she was dressing, shut her bedroom door with a snap that meant "It's not my caller, I'm sure;" and Nancy, slipping on her blue kimono, went to see what was wanted. In the door stood Vera Lawson, wearing her haughtiest manner. Behind Vera, Jane was rushing down the corridor, both hands full of bills. When she saw Vera, she stopped running, and, waving the bills mockingly over her head, silently awaited developments.

"Come in, Vera," said Nancy.

"No, thank you," returned Vera coldly. "Billy sent me to tell you that you're to row on the Reds. That stupid Lotta Ray caught her hand in a door, and can't hold an oar in it. You can wear her Red sweater, if you'll send some one to the Junior House for it. Billy wants you to meet the crew in our rooms in half an hour."

Having delivered her message, Vera prepared to withdraw, and backed gracefully into Jane Learned, who received the onslaught with a startled crumpling of the bills in her hand, and a muttered "Great hat!"

Vera shrugged disdainfully, and started on again.

"Oh, please wait a minute, Vera," cried Nancy, who was just beginning to recover from her aston-

ishment. "I don't understand, I'm afraid. Does Billy want me to row in Lotta's place—to-day—in the big race—when I've rowed with them only twice since the crew was regularly made up?"

"Yes," assented Vera coldly, "she does. They can't manage the boat without a full crew, I suppose. I really know nothing about it. Billy was feeling so worried and blue that I came over here to oblige her."

"Oh, I can't! I should lose them the race! I should be so scared that I'd—catch crabs," protested Nancy.

Vera's smooth forehead wrinkled in a puzzled, scornful frown. "There are no crabs in our lake," she announced blandly, whereat Jane, who understood nautical slang though she could not row a stroke, chuckled, and muttered "Great hat!" again.

"I never thought that the Subs really substituted," said Nancy, disregarding Vera's digression. "I thought they just gave the crews a better chance to practice."

"Billy says this is the first time in years that a member of the Reds has failed to row in the big race," explained Vera, softening a little in order to get matters settled for Billy. "You'd better be dressing, hadn't you?" she added rather impatiently. "There isn't much time."

"But I can't do it," protested Nancy weakly.

"I just can't do it! I should love to, but I can't bear to lose them the race."

Vera frowned again in annoyance. "Billy said you would be delighted to have a chance to row," she announced tactlessly. "I really can't argue with you. I don't understand anything about crews or races. I came to oblige Billy, because there was no one else around to come; and now I must go home to dress."

"But I can't ——" began Nancy.

"Nonsense!" Jane Learned, her hands full of crumpled bills, suddenly stepped forward and took command of the situation. "Of course you can. Remember my motto: What you have never done before you can do again; also my other favorite watchword: 'The last minute for mine—it pays to wait.' They fit this situation like a glove, N. Lee. Now you take this money and tuck it away in some safe spot, like your desk drawer; and while you dress I'll saunter over and procure you the official Red sweater. Tell Captain Billy that it's all right," ended Jane with a lordly gesture of dismissal for Vera, who departed summarily, returning, however, a moment later, to make sure that Nancy understood about the appointment with Billy.

"Yes," said Nancy, who was smoothing the bills that Jane had crumpled and laying them all neatly together in a small drawer of her desk,

hastily emptied for the purpose. "In half an hour, you said. I'll be ready. It takes me only a second to dress. This is Timmy's money, Vera,—the part that the girls gave. There's over forty-nine dollars."

"That's very nice, I'm sure," said Vera patronizingly, and once more she departed.

Nancy had filled the improvised money-drawer, and was putting it back in its place, when another shadow darkened the study door. This time it was Jeanne Durand.

One hand on the open drawer, Nancy turned to Jeanne with a welcoming smile. "The most exciting and frightful thing has happened to me," she explained. "I've just discovered that I'm to row on the Red Crew, in the place of a girl who's hurt her hand. Imagine that, when I've hardly practiced in their boat at all! Oh, Jeanne, I'm scared to pieces—but I'm fearfully happy too."

"And busy—what you say?—rushed to death," added little Jeanne with her wistful smile. "So I will go at once and not be in the way."

"You're not in the way, Jeanne," said Nancy, too happy not to be cordial. "I've just been counting and putting away Timmy's money that the girls collected this afternoon. Now I'm going to braid my hair tighter. You see, when I began dressing I didn't know that I was an Invincible.

Come in and talk to me while I get ready to be one."

But Jeanne refused to stay. "Another time, when you are no longer in excitement. Then I will come and tell you many things, and you shall advise."

"All right, Jeanne. Perhaps that will be better," agreed Nancy carelessly, rushing to tell Grace the news. It was not until she had dressed for the race, and, with Lotta's sweater over her shoulder, was starting to keep her engagement with Billy, that Nancy, glancing at her desk, noticed the small drawer still hanging open and closed it with a jerk. As she ran down-stairs, she wondered whether she ought to inform the trustees of the Baby Fund that the Fair Oaks subscriptions were in her hands; but she decided hastily that it would be foolish to do that now, especially as she was already late for the conference with Billy.

Nancy found the entire Red Crew, including the crippled and tearful Lotta, assembled in Billy's cool, darkened bedroom. Joyously, they fell upon the Sub-captain, and all talking at once bombarded her with instructions, advice, and congratulations, until Billy turned them out into the study, and in five minutes told Nancy all that she most needed to know, besides inspiring her with the confidence that she needed most of all. When, at ten min-

utes before four—the hour of the great race—Nancy marched with the other Reds from the Senior Cottage to the boat-house, between applauding lines of Fair Oaks girls and Float Day visitors, she confided to Margaret Lewis that she felt just as if she had always been an Invincible.

"And yet, if Jane hadn't insisted, in her funny, comical way, I should have made Vera go back and say that I just couldn't do it."

"Billy told Vera not to let you say no," Margaret told her. "I came over with the sad news from Lotta, and so I heard what Billy said to Vera. She asked her to go because she can always make people do what she wants."

"She didn't try much with me," said Nancy thoughtfully. "It was Jane who made me do it. But Vera took pains to come back and make sure that I understood about meeting with you at the Cottage. Oh, Margaret, what if we should lose!"

"We shan't. You mustn't even think of it," declared Margaret.

Nancy didn't. Neither did she think of catching crabs. She put her whole mind on keeping stroke, and she rowed so well that nobody among the spectators on the bank could have guessed which was the Sub; they would far sooner have picked Mildred, or a tall, nervous girl named

Felicia Harrington, who kept muttering, "Row on! Row on!" in a most disconcerting fashion.

"A race is a lot like a wedding, isn't it?" said Jane, on the bank, to Plain Mary and Dr. Jim. "Lots of fuss and feathers beforehand, and then all over in a minute."

This particular race lasted exactly four minutes and twenty-six seconds, from its start beyond the curve of the lake to its finish opposite the boat-house. It was neck and neck all the way, and it ended—ingloriously for the hitherto always victorious Reds—in a tie.

"But a tie doesn't deprive the Invincibles of their title," said Captain Billy gaily, after one little moment of bitter disappointment.

"It's nicer for the Blues than being beaten," piped up Mildred Wallace.

"And it's not Nancy Lee's fault," cried Margaret, who had noticed the anguished look on the Sub-captain's face.

"It's Nancy's glory," declared Billy vehemently. "If Nancy hadn't rowed like a scholar and a sportsman, we should have been beaten into the end of next week."

Dr. Jim and Plain Mary and Jane, coming to congratulate the missing member of their special party, repeated Billy's declaration that the Sub had saved the day for the Reds.

"Then I am really to blame for the miserable tie," sighed Nancy, "because if I hadn't cut practice at first I should have been really an Invincible, and then we might have won outright."

"Also, you might have lost outright," said Jane.

"Exactly," smiled Dr. Jim. "You can argue endlessly of possibilities, but there is no difference of opinion about the deliciousness of Fair Oaks lemonade. Come and cool off with some, Miss Nancy."

"How's the puppy?" asked Nancy, between refreshing sips.

"Oh, Commander's all right," laughed Dr. Jim. "You would better ask how much is left of my farm since Commander took possession. It's minus several chickens, and one new harness has been chewed to ruins, besides some minor disasters. But that boy Rob has grown ten years younger and happier; so I still defer to your high opinion of the curative value of puppies, Miss Nancy."

A regular feature of Float Day was the outdoor supper on the piazza. While it was going on, fantastic figures crept out side-doors and ran by obscure paths to the boat-house. Just as the sunset was at its loveliest, a bugle summoned the banqueters to watch the cortège of decorated canoes winding, like some great, wonderfully colored,

sinuous snake, across the little lake, then up and down and back again, growing ghost-like in the gathering dusk, and finally gaining a new beauty, as the festoons of lanterns that each canoe carried were lighted, and fresh charm as the crews broke into song.

Finally the little boats massed in a dim, firefly-lit company by the boat-house, and, to more music on the water and from the crowds on shore, the fireworks were sent up from the opposite bank of the lake. They were not very wonderful fireworks, but the night was perfect for them, and so was the setting of lake and wood, with the group of lighted boats splashing the foreground with color and breaking the dark water into rippling reflections. Girls are easily pleased; and their high spirits infected the rest of the crowd.

"Too bad Timmy couldn't stay up to see it all," mourned Nancy. "Then it would have been perfect."

"What an absurd idea!" commented Plain Mary. "The way Timmy howled, when Mary Ann carried him off to bed to-night, showed that he'd already had far too much excitement."

"Yes, I know," said Nancy sadly. "Only it's hard for me to believe in all these rules about normal children."

"Knowing and believing are two entirely dif-

ferent things, aren't they?" mused Jane. "For instance, I know that to-morrow will be a regular school-day, with lessons, sewing, and even, I fear, a Neatness and Order report; but to-night I can't realize it. I can't believe that all this leisurely loveliness that surrounds me will vanish with the dawn, any more than Nancy can believe that Timmy wouldn't have loved to stay and see it through."

"That's very well put, Miss Jane," laughed Dr. Jim. "And I'm rather glad that the course in scientific baby-tending hasn't converted all of you to the latest theories. I will confess to you three in confidence, that I tried to bribe Mary Ann into letting me carry Timmy around for a while longer, and her stern insistence on his regular bedtime annoyed me, even while I 'knew,' as Miss Jane says, that Mary Ann was in the right. You've heard nothing more from the Kansas City people, I suppose."

"Not yet," said Plain Mary. "Miss Marshall wrote to Mr. Sefton right away."

"We aren't in a great hurry to have to let Timmy go," added Nancy.

"We know we ought to want his parents to have him, but all the same we can't bear to lose him," explained Jane.

"Don't tell Miss Marshall," Dr. Jim confided in

a sepulchral whisper, "but I can't bear to have him go either."

"Goody!" cried Plain Mary.

"The money we have for him won't last forever," warned Nancy.

"But when it's gone we'll get more," added optimistic Jane. "Let's change our war-cry, 'For Timmy,' to 'Timmy forever'!"

"Wouldn't it be safer to amend that to 'till he's of age'?" suggested Dr. Jim solemnly. "You really couldn't hope to keep him tied to your feminine apron-strings longer than that, you know."

Upon being accused of joking by Plain Mary, who always took her delightful guardian with the utmost seriousness until driven to regard him in another light, Dr. Jim told her gaily that, if she felt that way about him, it was certainly time for him to go. The campus was emptying rapidly, and Miss Cripps, stationed at the dormitory door to check up her charges as they returned, informed Jane and Nancy that they were among the very last comers, and that in fifteen minutes the lights would go out.

Five minutes of the precious fifteen were wasted in divesting Christina of a Pocahontas costume and complexion, which she had donned to adorn the Canoe of the Aborigines. And then Nancy

had to give Grace, who was already in bed, some "inside information" about the race. The lights flickered and died out while Nancy sat on Grace's bed talking.

"Oh, dear!" she cried in sudden consternation. "I suppose I'm supposed to be ready for bed now. It's awfully inconvenient to be on your honor all the time, because of Timmy, isn't it? Good-night, Grace."

Three minutes later Nancy Lee lay in her own bed, ready for the sleep that usually came to her as soon as her head touched its pillow. She was ready for it to-night, between excitement, and exertion, and the unusually late hour. The bed felt deliciously soft and "comfy," and Nancy snuggled down as contentedly as a sleepy kitten. But the next minute she was sitting bolt upright, struck by a sudden thought. Timmy's money! She hadn't given it to Miss Marshall to put in the safe. She hadn't even looked to see if it was still in her desk. But of course it was!

Nancy crept softly out into the study and opened the little drawer. There was a reassuring crumple of stiff bills as she put her hand in; and then Nancy gave a low cry of surprise and dismay. There were just two bills in the box, and under them a wad of soft paper to hold them up and make the drawer look full.

"NOW, LOOK AGAIN"

"Grace!" called Nancy, and in a minute Grace, shivering with fright over the first noise that Nancy had made, appeared at her side. "The money is gone!" whispered Nancy, her eyes round with horror. "Timmy's money! All but two bills. Oh, Grace, isn't it dreadful?"

Grace felt her way among the huddled bric-à-brac on Nancy's desk until she found the matches. "Now," she said, when she had lighted both of Nancy's slender brass tapers, "now, look again, Nancy, and be quite sure."

Nancy's yellow head bent low over the drawer. Then she pulled it out of the desk and held it up for Grace to see. "The two bills that are left are ones," she said despairingly, "and the tissue paper underneath is some that was in my waste-basket. Oh, Grace, what shall we do?"

Grace sat down deliberately in Nancy's desk chair. "It's too late to do anything to-night, I guess," she said finally.

"Oh, but we must, Grace," wailed Nancy. "I must, I mean. I'm treasurer of Timmy's money, you know. It's Timmy's money—all that the girls promised, except Jane-and-Christina's sixty-six cents, that they didn't have because they'd spent it, and my thirty, that I was too rushed this afternoon to put in."

"Then that much is saved," said Grace gravely.

"Ninety-six cents saved, and over forty-seven dollars gone!" smiled Nancy. "Do you understand, Grace? I left it all in this drawer before the race, and now it's gone. I couldn't take it to the bank to-day, could I? But I ought to have asked Miss Marshall to keep it in her safe. I've been careless again. Now they'll never, never trust me with anything. Father will replace the money, of course,—he wouldn't let Timmy suffer through me,—but everybody will know that I lost it—Timmy's money. Oh, Grace!"

"We'd better call Jane and Christina," said Grace, who, not being used to playing the part of consoler and comforter, found Nancy's grief quite terrible. "Jane helped you count the money, and perhaps she took it to Miss Marshall—or hid it away somewhere for a joke."

But the twins, who were discovered still working, in the dark, on the obstinate remnants of Pocahontas's swarthy tan,—which really could not appear at classes next morning in connection with Christina's blond hair,—were both almost as amazed and alarmed as Nancy.

"All that money gone!" cried Christina. "Oh, what a shame that we happened to collect it to-day."

"Indeed, I didn't take it to Miss Marshall, or hide it," declared Jane solemnly. "I should con-

sider hiding that pile of money a very poor joke."

"What do you think happened to it?" demanded Grace Allen, who had absurdly unbounded confidence in Jane's intuitions.

Jane shook her head dubiously. "How should I know, Grace? The school grounds were full of strangers to-day."

"Yes," said Grace, "but there were maids at all the doors to let people in and out, and none but the girls were allowed up-stairs. I know about that, because I came to the house when Mary Ann was taking her turn at our front door, and of course she stopped me to explain all about the arrangements."

"Of course," said Jane grimly. "Well, that practically eliminates the stray female of burglarious intent, who might have walked in at one of the doors. And it certainly hasn't been a likely day for a burglar to climb in at a window. That leaves us and the maids."

"Jane!" Christina's voice sounded a note of shocked propriety.

"Well, why not face the facts, Christina darling?" asked Jane, with a consolatory pat on Christina's arm. "You and I and Plain Mary and Alice Borden and ——"

"I," put in Grace quietly.

"And you," went on Jane coolly, "knew that Nancy had this money.

"I myself suggested her putting it away in her desk drawer. Oh, yes, Vera Lawson knew about it, too—she was here telling Nancy about the crew when I came up with the bills. She heard me speak of using the desk drawer—that is, if she condescended to put ear to my childish patter. Any one else involved, Nancy?"

"Yes," said Nancy, falling easily into Jane's matter-of-fact method of discussion. "Jeanne Durand came in just as I was putting the money away, and I believe I mentioned it to her. But she probably didn't understand what I was talking about."

"Did she see the money?" asked Jane.

"Yes, I think she must have."

"Any one else?"

"No, I shut the drawer soon after that, and never thought of the money again until just now."

Jane stood up and stretched lazily. "Well, then we may as well go to bed. We can't run around to-night, routing out the rest of the suspects ——"

"Jane!" protested Christina again.

"We've just got to face the facts, Christina," Jane insisted. "But what I was going to say was this: any one of the girls who knew you had the money, and didn't know about the guarded doors

down-stairs, may have thought that the fund ought to go right into the safe; and in the confusion and excitement one of them may have taken it and forgotten to tell you—just as Grace thought I might have done so."

"But Alice and Mary didn't know where Nancy put the money," objected Christina, "any more than I did."

"Um—that's so," considered Jane. "But Vera Lawson knew. Vera likes to manage other people's affairs. Perhaps she took charge of the Timmy fund."

"She certainly knew how flustered and hurried I was," suggested Nancy hopefully, "and how likely I'd be to forget everything but the race."

"Have you looked around to see if any one left a note about it?" asked Grace.

But careful search by the light of the tapers failed to reveal a note.

"Vera wouldn't have left one," said Jane. "She wouldn't condescend so far. She's got some mysterious feud with Nancy and us twins. If she took the money for safe-keeping, she'd like to make us worry a little. Come to bed, Christina. There's nothing more to be done to-night."

"Thank you a lot for all your good ideas," said Nancy faintly. "Of course if the money is really

lost, father will replace it. But oh, I do hate to have them all know how careless I've been."

"Well, I'm afraid we'd better not try to conceal this piece of carelessness by covering it with a feature," said Jane, adding reassuringly, "I don't think you were very careless, Nancy. I was more to blame than you, for suggesting that you save time by stuffing the money away in a drawer. If it has to be replaced, I shall go halves with you."

"I want to help too," said Christina.

"So do I," put in Grace. "I ought to have asked Nancy how I could help her, when I saw how—how ——"

"Rattled she was about the crew business," Jane supplied.

"Yes," agreed Grace. "I ought to have looked after her."

Grace's assumption of responsibility for Nancy's vagaries was so comical that the others laughed in spite of their worry.

"You're all perfect dears," said Nancy heartily. "And I appreciate your wanting to help replace the money, but I shan't let you. If Jane's calculations are right," she added hastily, "the money can't be stolen. For we've gone over all the possibilities—as Jane calls them—and we know perfectly well that the servants are honest, and that

none of those girls who knew about it took Timmy's money, except for safe-keeping."

"Of course not," said Christina.

"Of course not," echoed Grace.

Jane said nothing, which was not considered strange, since she was out in the corridor before Christina and Grace had spoken. Jane was intent upon getting Christina away before the smaller twin remembered something: an unpleasant episode that had happened at their first boarding-school and that had impressed upon Jane's facile mind the fact that there can be no easy dismissal of "possibilities" when money is missing.

"Great hat!" sighed Jane, in the hall. "Why didn't I remember that sooner? I knew money wasn't safe anywhere. I knew it hard. Why on earth did I babble about stuffing fifty dollars into a desk drawer?"

CHAPTER XVII

TROUBLOUS TIMES

NANCY LEE was too tired not to sleep in spite of her worry. But she dreamed dreadful dreams that came to a climax when Jane Learned began pelting her with dollar bills, and Billy Bray, coming to the rescue of her faithful Sub-captain, hit Jane over the head with an oar; whereupon Nancy screamed and woke herself up, feeling as if she had been asleep about ten minutes, to find the sun shining, and Grace, in a dainty negligee, shaking her shoulder.

"I felt sure you wouldn't want to be late this morning," said Grace.

Nancy blinked wearily. "Would it count for a red circle, if I were?" she demanded vaguely. "Oh! Now I remember! Thank you, Grace. Has the rising bell just this minute rung? Then perhaps I can see Vera before breakfast."

"And I'll see Mary Smith and Alice Borden," offered Grace. "They're in the same house."

When Nancy and Grace, returned from their respective missions, met in the breakfast crowd down-

stairs, the downcast face of each told the other that the lost money was not accounted for.

The twins speedily joined the roommates, and Jane at once took command of the situation. "Christina and Plain Mary and I will go with you after chapel, when you tell Miss Marshall about it," she informed Nancy. "I presume Alice will want to come with us. We'd better not talk much now, so do just tell me whether the others had any theories to offer when you went to see them."

Grace said, "Not any new ones," decisively.

Nancy blushed. "I talked with Vera only a minute. She said she'd think it over and see me again."

Jane smiled. "She wants to beat me in my unrivaled presentation of 'Jane, the beautiful young detective.' She's certainly welcome to try this time."

Nancy's breakfast was untouched. She had hoped against hope that morning would bring back the money. Now hope seemed gone. Excusing herself, she went to the school post-office, where she scribbled a special-delivery letter to her father. He would get it that afternoon, and he would telegraph a reassuring answer, Nancy felt sure. But until the positive assurance that she could make good Timmy's loss was actually in her

hands, Nancy felt that life would not be worth living.

The next thing was to see Miss Marshall. Up in her study, staring out at the sunlit campus, Nancy tried to plan what she should say. It was kind of Jane and the rest to stand by her, but at the idea of explaining before them all, Nancy's hands grew cold and her cheeks hot. Still, they had a right to come. They were the Collection Committee, Nancy was Treasurer, and the money that the Committee had given her was gone—Timmy's money, that the girls had contributed. Perhaps the girls, too, had a right to know what had happened. So, certainly, had the other trustees, Miss Cripps and Miss Dutton. Mary Ann and Cook had each contributed a quarter. Yes, every one at Fair Oaks was involved in Nancy Lee's last and worst piece of forgetfulness.

The chapel hour was at once agonizing delay and all-too-short respite. Nancy's hands grew colder; icy chills crept up and down her spine. When the service was over and she found Jane, who was marshaling her forces in the corridor, Nancy looked so white and wan that Jane was frightened.

"Buck up, N. Lee!" she advised hastily. "You look as if you thought we thought you'd taken the money. If you had, you couldn't buck up, of

course. But under the more favorable present circumstances you can. Remember that Miss Marshall's a little bit of all right, and that you shouldn't cry over spilt milk, and smile. That's right! Come along, girls."

Miss Marshall listened to Nancy's logically-told story with a kindly seriousness that made every girl in the room feel at once relieved of a load of worry and shouldered with a new responsibility.

"I have written father," Nancy concluded her story. "And I am sure—almost sure—that he will let me make good this loss myself. And as it all came from my having been careless, couldn't we wait, Miss Marshall, until I've heard from him? And then, if he writes what I think he will, couldn't we quietly drop the matter? If there has been some—mistake, the money will be returned. And if not,—unless it was taken by an outsider, which doesn't seem possible,—oh, Miss Marshall, I couldn't bear to have one of the servants—or—or—— You know what I want to say, Miss Marshall!"

"Yes," agreed Miss Marshall quietly, "I know exactly. You want to replace the money ——"

"The rest of us collectors want to help about that," cut in Jane eagerly.

Miss Marshall nodded. "And in that way you want to pay for your carelessness without involv-

ing any one else. That won't do. One way that people have to pay for their carelessness is by seeing the injuries they inflict on others. You carelessly gave somebody a chance to be, I'm afraid, dishonest. Now you must take the consequences, and let the other person or persons share them. I'm sorry, Nancy, but I can't see any other way out."

"She wasn't so very careless, was she?" demanded little Christina eagerly. "Lots of the girls leave their money around. There are chances here all the time to be—dishonest. And Jane suggested using the desk drawer."

"I did," interposed Jane calmly, "and I ought to have known better. I did know better, Miss Marshall."

Miss Marshall sighed. "It's a pity, Jane, that we have to know better, isn't it?" Then she turned suddenly terse and businesslike, asked swift, incisive questions that speedily brought out all Jane's "possibilities" and one or two more, mapped out a plan of campaign, rang for Mary Ann, who could give details of the afternoon's door-tending, and dismissed the girls with a stern, "No gossiping about this, please. I shall warn Vera and Jeanne to say nothing," and a farewell smile that cheered them all for the day's work.

At four o'clock exactly, Nancy's telegram ar-

rived : " Will cancel plan for your taking special vacation trip, and send forty-nine—sixty-nine, if desired."

Nancy rushed with the good news to Grace and the twins.

" Too bad," said Jane, who got hold of the telegram first.

Nancy stared. " Oh, you mean about the trip. I don't care anything about that. Of course it's fun to go off sailing, or camping or something like that. I wonder if father and mother and Dick will go without me. Well, anyhow, I don't care. I must hurry and tell Miss Marshall."

" She's extra busy to-day, Nancy," warned Grace. " And didn't you say that she felt she must investigate anyway, whether you could return the money yourself or not ? "

Nancy nodded sadly. " So of course I needn't bother her. Oh, dear ! "

" You'd better come and play tennis with me," advised Christina.

" Thank you, but I can't," declared Nancy desperately. " I'll write father to send the money, and then I'll go out and wander around and talk to people who don't know anything about what's happened. That's all I'm good for this afternoon —lounging around like a Fashion Plate."

For a while Nancy did as she had intended,

avoiding, easily enough, all those who were connected with her overwhelming misfortune, and diverting her thoughts by forcing herself to talk to the girls she happened to meet in the course of her "lounging."

"Come up in the Crooked Elm, Nancy. I want to talk to you."

Nancy, who had just sent off little Sarah, because the child's ceaseless chatter about the squirrels wearied her, turned from idly watching Sarah's little skipping figure, to be confronted with Jane Learned. Jane was still carrying her tennis racket. Her wispy hair was in her eyes, and she looked hot and tired after her hour's hard exercise; but the agitation that pervaded her tall figure had nothing whatever to do with the excitement of the tennis match, or the irritation of having lost a "love" set to Plain Mary Smith.

In mournful silence Nancy followed Jane up the Crooked Elm's stairway. Jane had discovered something about Timmy's money, and it was not a pleasant discovery,—to judge by Jane's face.

"Well, N. Lee," announced Jane, when they were comfortably settled, "somebody's not playing the game. No, I don't mean that any one has squealed—though naturally the girls suspect something, with all the interviews Miss Marshall has had to-day and you sending special-deliveries and

getting telegrams, and all. But somebody has been slugging—hitting Jeanne Durand from behind. A sweet story is going the rounds of the school to the effect that she tells lies."

"Well, does she?" demanded Nancy vaguely. "I shouldn't suppose —— Oh, Jane, did Vera Lawson say that?"

Jane nodded slowly. "Again we think alike, as we did about the mystery of the town arrow. But we couldn't prove our suspicions then, and we can't now, I suppose. Furnishing Vera with a motive for discrediting Jeanne's character would be a pretty dangerous business."

"I'm not sure that I quite understand you, Jane," began Nancy doubtfully.

"The plain English is pretty blunt," returned Jane. "I mean that if Vera is trying to make any one think Jeanne the kind of person who'd take Timmy's money, she must have a very good reason for doing it. I don't think she's taking a belated revenge for Jeanne's having gotten the best of her at the archery tournament. I think this is a newer score than that month-old affair that Vera must have half forgotten before this. According to my notion, either Vera Lawson has good reason to think Jeanne took the money, or—she hasn't."

"Oh, Jane!" Nancy's voice was full of horror. "Oh, Jane! I can't think Vera knows any such

thing. And I can't think she meant to connect Jeanne with the—the ——"

"Robbery," supplied Jane calmly.

"There's something you don't know, Jane," went on Nancy swiftly,—"a silly little thing that Jeanne told me a long time ago; but I've never spoken of it, because I thought Jeanne would prefer that I shouldn't." Nancy related the story that Jeanne had told her, of the château, the wealthy and distinguished family, and the brilliant social career that Vera Lawson had ingeniously bestowed upon the fatherless, fortuneless little French girl, who hoped some day to be a governess in New York or Paris. "And as Vera hasn't a sense of humor," ended Nancy at last, "and hates to be teased, and doesn't realize how Jeanne really said nothing, but just let her go rambling on about the château and the motor cars and all,—why, I suppose Vera really believes that Jeanne isn't truthful. Vera can't see a joke—we've often noticed that. And of course if Jeanne hadn't been joking, she'd have been wilfully deceiving Vera, and that would have been really—dishonest," concluded Nancy with a quaver for the dreadful word.

Jane listened patiently to Nancy's story. "So you think Vera is just peeved at Jeanne's joke," she said. "You think the story has nothing at

all to do with our robbery—that it's a mere coincidence that this unpleasant rumor should be floated to-day, instead of yesterday or last week?"

"Why, ye-es," said Nancy, still not quite catching Jane's drift.

Jane stared in thoughtful silence down over the green campus to the smooth blue lake. "Why do you suppose Vera never told us about the château?" she wondered. "It would have made a lovely tale for the Vera-ites to listen to with bated breath. But, so far as I know, it has never been told to any one."

"No," said Nancy, "I don't believe it has. I can't quite see why Vera didn't tell—if she really believed in the château and the other splendors. And she must have believed, or she wouldn't have been angry. Kittie told Christina that Vera and Jeanne have nothing to do with each other now."

"U-um." Jane stared engrossedly at the lake, the sky, and the meshes of her tennis racket.

"I say, N. Lee," she began idly, at last, "the Fault Factory is going to turn detective agency. Do you want to continue in your rôle of my chief assistant?"

"To hunt the—the—person who took Timmy's money? Is that what you're going to try to detect, Jane?"

"Sure. Miss Marshall hasn't half the chance we

have to look into this business. We really ought to help, you know, Nancy. And if we succeed, why, you can go on your summer trip. The person whom we detect at having taken the money will naturally return it."

"Haven't I said, Jane, that I don't mind giving up the trip? I feel to blame for all the trouble we're in, and—oh, I can't bear to know who took the money! The Fault Factory was just fun, but this—this will be dreadful earnest," cried Nancy with a catch in her voice. "No, Jane, I don't want to help you at all."

Jane stared at her sensitive friend in silence, realizing with a sudden start of astonishment how much older and more experienced and more callous she was, in most matters, than Nancy Lee. As for Christina, that small person was about as much use in the present crisis as Timmy Lee Marshall. Jane would have to do what she did alone.

But one thing, she resolved, Nancy should help her with. Nancy had been good enough friends with Vera until lately, and she was far more acute and observant than Christina. Therefore Nancy should interview Vera,—a thing which Jane, Vera's *bête noir*, could ill manage,—find out the truth about Vera's connection with the vaguely ugly and very ill-timed rumor about Jeanne, urge her to contradict or explain it, and—"Well, notice

a few small details," as Jane put the matter to herself, with inclusive vagueness.

Now Nancy must be made to see her duty as Jane saw it, though motives, widely different from Jane's, would urge her to perform it. Jane would have interviewed Vera,—if Vera hadn't disliked her too much ever to talk to her freely,—in the interests of truth, in the fascinating pursuit of knowledge. Now Nancy saw no charm in the scientific investigation of "possibilities," and she particularly did not want to know the truth about the robbery. But she loved fair play, and she was genuinely fond of Jeanne Durand. Fair play for Jeanne, accordingly, was the note Jane craftily sounded.

So, "All right," she began finally, "I'll have to give my chief assistant a vacation, while the Fault Factory tries its hand at hunting defaulters instead of curing faults. But Nancy, there's one thing I wish you did want to do,—or feel that you ought to do. Go to Vera Lawson, tell her that the girls are repeating insinuations on Jeanne's honesty, connecting them with the fact she's an utter stranger to us all, appearing suddenly and for no good reason at the school; and that when the facts of the robbery are made public, as they must be soon, public opinion will hint 'Why not Jeanne Durand?' Tell her that you know all about the château business. Give her your—and Jeanne's—

version. Then ask her to be a good sport and explain to everybody—sacrifice her foolish pride to save Jeanne's reputation. Keep your eyes open and find out why she's been so snippy to you and Christina lately. Oh, and ask her why she suppressed her beautiful dreams of a superfine château, with all the extras. Will you, Nancy? I can't, being too cordially hated by the great Vera to be received by her with the deference due my genius. And I truly think that just a word said right now would mean a lot later on to Jeanne—our waif-and-stray."

"Would the girls really think she might have ——?"

"They certainly would," returned Jane swiftly. "That is, the foolish ones; and they are bound to convince their wise friends, if we don't convince them first."

"All right," said Nancy, rising. "I think Vera went back to the Senior Cottage a few minutes ago." And she began climbing down the steps to the ground.

Jane watched her swift, graceful progress admiringly. "Come back here when you're through!" she called. "Then, if it's all right, I can begin spreading the real right story. I'm a perfect genius at spreading things.

"But I wish," added Jane to herself, "that I

was pretty and graceful and sweet and young-feeling. You can cultivate brains, and you have to grow up, whether you try to or not. But the best thing of all is to keep young-feeling,—to believe in people and things. People are nice to Nancy because she thinks of course they will be. And yet Nancy's not stupid. If anybody can persuade Vera Lawson to be generous about this business, Nancy can, because she can't imagine not being generous. But it will take cold and calculating me, who can imagine anything, to see through Vera Lawson. Here's hoping Nancy stays unsuspicious of me, and tells me everything."

Over in the Senior House Vera sat,—with her back to the light because her head ached, and one high-heeled slipper tapping the floor in quick nervous motion,—and listened to Nancy's story.

"Jeanne didn't just 'let me talk,'" objected Vera crossly. "She led me on. And Jane Learned planned the whole thing. I suppose she's behind your coming here to stop the consequences of her having tried to make me a general laughing-stock."

Nancy hastened to confute Vera's hypothesis. "Was that why you wouldn't speak to Jane, and were—rather cool to me and Christina?"

"Yes," admitted Vera calmly, "it was. If Jeanne planned the thing herself, I think all the

worse of her. But of course one can't expect good taste or high standards of a peasant." Vera gave a disagreeable little laugh. "You remember how rude she was the day of the archery contest—how she put me in an impossible position, and then compelled you to second her. Oh, I knew you wouldn't have done such a horrid thing unless she'd forced your hand, Nancy. And now I'm going to tell you something that will certainly make you laugh. But I don't mind sharing a joke with a good friend like you—in confidence, of course."

Nancy promised, feeling the inexplicable thrill of pride that Vera's flattery seemed always to produce, even in those who knew Vera's glaring faults and absurd limitations.

"Well, then, as luck will have it, I've never spoken to a soul of Jeanne's social position. Not because I didn't fully believe in her, but because I didn't want the rest of the girls to run after her just for her money and the family titles. I thought it would be a shame to have that sort of vulgar fortune-hunting going on here. And see how my silence has saved the rest of you from absurdity! Now laugh at me, Nancy, for being so gullible."

Nancy smiled wanly and rose to go. "I don't feel like laughing at anybody to-night, Vera.

You'll explain just what you meant about Jeanne, won't you? And may I? It won't be necessary to go into details, but—you never meant to hint, of course, that Jeanne took the missing money, but Jane—you guessed that it was she who asked me to come—Jane was afraid that some one else might think so."

Vera, who had risen too, stood, tall and graceful, smiling her patronizing, superior smile down at Nancy. "Possibly Jane is among those who might think so," she suggested coldly. "Jane seems to be a very clever person, if her friends are good judges. Come again, Nancy, when we can talk about something amusing. Or take me canoeing to-morrow. I'm getting quite sentimental about the lake and the campus and the village, that I probably shall never see again after next week."

As Nancy went out, she stooped to pick up an envelope from the floor near the door.

Vera thanked her. "Take it along," she urged jocosely. "It's only another bill. I get nothing but bills in my mail nowadays. Pay cash for all your fun, and when you're a senior you'll be happy."

Jane had seen Nancy leave the Senior House, and was waiting for her under the Crooked Elm. She listened carefully to Nancy's account of her

call, and assured her heartily that by acting as Jeanne's defender, she had saved "oceans of fuss." But inwardly Jane voted the interview a failure.

"I might have noticed something, if I'd gone," she meditated on the way to the dormitory, "but either Nancy hasn't a suspicion of what I wanted to know, or she's a splendid bluffer. She answered all the plainest questions I dared risk, and she's told me nothing that I hoped to find out."

Jane dressed for dinner in a mood of deep depression. She longed for an understanding person to talk things over with. Life looked very bleak and lonely, and her thoughts traveled in a dismal, tangled circle.

Dinner cheered everybody up. Ice-cream with chocolate sauce helped Jane to forget her disappointments. Nancy was unreasonably relieved to notice that Miss Dutton was wearing a new pink evening-dress, and that Miss Marshall laughed heartily at all the jokes that went round her table. And after dinner on the wide piazza that took the place of the gym. as a summer rendezvous Miss Marshall read them a letter from Mr. Sefton,—which, if it was disappointing in some ways, was certainly cheering in respect to the great issue: Timmy would not be snatched from them "by return parcel post," as Jane had phrased it.

Mr. Sefton's letter was brief to the point of curtness :

"MISS MARSHALL,

"*Madam* :—

"I have never had a child stolen. A suggestion of an attempt to kidnap my only son, then fourteen months old, resulted in the dismissal of a trusted nurse. You ask her name : Mary Raftery. I believe she went with her husband to reside in Michigan. I am unable to furnish her address.

"Your correspondent in our county seat has succeeded in wasting valuable time for both of us.

"Yours respectfully,

"JOSEPH SEFTON."

"If he could see Timmy, he wouldn't be so snippy, I guess."

"Or if he knew Miss Marshall!"

"Well, her time is valuable and this Sefton business seems to have been a silly clue."

"How do you suppose that lawyer thought Timmy came into the Sefton case?"

"In his second letter,—the one Miss Marshall mentioned but didn't read,—he said he thought the servant who was dismissed might help us to find Timmy's family. That's why Miss Marshall asked particularly for her name and address."

So the eager questions and comments ran from group to group, culminating in little Mildred

Wallace's shrilly pitched: "What can you do next, please, Miss Marshall?"

"Advertise in Michigan instead of Missouri," answered Miss Marshall. "And mention Mary Raftery in the notices. Suppose, Mildred, that your rhetoric division convene informally, if Miss Cripps will consent to meet with you,—at once, in some quiet corner, and furnish me with the appropriate notice. I want to telegraph it to my agent to-night. Why do I hurry? Well, this lovely spring term is nearly over, you see, and if Timmy's parents are to be found soon, I should like to have the news in time for Timmy's guardians to hear all about it."

Nancy Lee was in Mildred's rhetoric division. She surprised herself by being able to take a deep interest in the Michigan advertisement of Timmy; she even furnished part of the final draft, approved by Miss Cripps as being "terse and logical," and by Plain Mary Smith as "sounding as if it meant business and Mary Raftery would certainly write."

"INFORMATION WANTED in regard to family of two-year-old boy stolen last summer in Missouri. MARY RAFTERY will be liberally rewarded for communicating with present possessor of child. Address M., Box 15, Fair Oaks, Mass."

So ran the paragraph that Miss Marshall telegraphed to her agent that evening. Fair Oaks

breathlessly awaited the result. For Miss Marshall had agreed to Billy Bray's suggestion about Timmy's summer: if, after the Michigan advertisement had run a week, with two days more allowed for a reply to reach Fair Oaks, nothing had been heard from it, the girls might meet to consider the various possibilities open to Timmy, and might themselves decide upon a temporary home for him. It was going to be a very exciting business—with offers fairly pouring in to choose from. Fair Oaks was divided as to which would be more thrilling: news from Mary Raftery or a chance to "lend" Timmy for the summer. In any case, Fair Oaks felt pleasantly important.

"It's no good being a senior this year," announced Billy Bray, with a grin that belied her words. "Seniors and their big doings aren't in it with Timmy Lee Marshall."

Meantime Timmy's lost money did not turn up. The munificent returns from the Fairy Party were banked for him by a much perturbed treasurer, who clutched Mrs. Barton's cheque quite frantically all the way to the bank. The treasurer insisted upon completing the fund by depositing a smaller cheque, duly signed by her father; and as the days wore on it looked as if there was scant prospect of her being reimbursed for her loss, which, she protested vigorously, she didn't mind one bit.

After a day or two of fruitless investigation, Miss Marshall took the course that Jane had foreseen, and announced the theft in a speech that made every girl who heard it think of all the little mean or dishonorable things she had ever done, and resolve to try to live up to Miss Marshall's high standard of truth and honor hereafter. For no one would steal money, Miss Marshall said, who hadn't begun by stealing other things : time that belonged to study, praise that had not been fairly won, pleasures that were too expensive. At this last phrase several seniors exchanged abashed glances ; for Vera Lawson was not the only one who was getting more bills than she wanted from the Fair Oaks shops.

" If you don't pay your parents a fair equivalent for their kindness and sacrifice in educating you, by trying to be educated," Miss Marshall went on, " if you don't tell the truth in little matters, if you spend beyond your allowances, you are leading up to a bigger, worse sort of dishonesty. I hope that if any one among us can explain this matter, and so blot out the disgrace that now hangs over the school, she will act the noble part—give herself a chance to be, from this day on, the fine, high-minded woman that every one of you, no matter how you have spoiled or wasted your chances so far in life, has still the full capacity to be."

There was a long, strained silence. "I shall be in my office all the afternoon," said Miss Marshall in a dull, tired voice; but there was no response to her final plea. A day or two later she announced to Nancy and the Collection Committee that she had done all she could, and Nancy once more stoutly refused the Committee's offer to help replace the money.

"That's over," said Jane, as she and Nancy and Christina went off to secure the canoe that Mildred Wallace had promised to hold for them.

"Yes, and we've forgotten our boat-cushions," said Christina. "You two go along and I'll run back for them. I want a hat too."

"Who cares for a little sunburn?" said Jane loftily. "Not I, and N. Lee doesn't burn, lucky lady! But we'll wait for you, Christina darling, at the wharf."

"Let's swap secrets," said Jane, when Christina had gone. "If you'll tell me fair and square where you think that money went, I'll tell you what I think."

"All right," said Nancy carelessly. "I think some stranger stole it. I can't believe it was any other way—I don't want to know it, if it was."

Jane looked frightened. "I'd better not tell you what I think," she said. "I'd forgotten how you feel."

"Go ahead, Jane," said Nancy, too light-hearted because the episode was closed, to consider what she was saying.

"Well, then, I think Vera Lawson took that money. Oh, I know she's supposed to be made of money herself; but she spends it like water, and if her father has any sense,—which he probably has, —he must object. She's got a lot of bills to pay just now, and seeing that money, she —— Oh, it doesn't sound reasonable, does it? And once before,—about the crew business,—I suspected her unjustly and made you unhappy. I don't like Vera, and I don't trust her. I think she meant to throw suspicion on Jeanne. But that's no argument. Personal feelings don't count in a thing of this kind. Oh, N. Lee, don't look so shocked! It's a good thing I confided my theory to you, because now I see what piffle it is. I discard it! I disown it! Smile, N. Lee, and forget it—every word. So will I. You're a lovely comfortable Triangler, Nancy dear."

"Why is she lovely and comfortable, Jane?" demanded Christina, appearing behind a huge armful of pillows. "Of course I know she is, but why?"

"Because she smiles when I talk," said Jane, tucking all the pillows under one long arm. "She smiles and forgets it, don't you, N. Lee? And that's true friendship."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT DECISION

In spite of Vera Lawson's rather ungracious denial of the rumor about Jeanne Durand's untruthfulness, in spite even of Jane Learned's "genius for spreading things," which she employed generously in Jeanne's behalf—and in spite of Nancy's and Christina's and other girls' earnest defense of the little stranger, there remained an undercurrent of feeling against her in Fair Oaks School.

"If she didn't take the money, who did? All the servants are trustworthy; they've been here for years, and this is the first robbery in the history of the school." So ran the trend of public opinion.

"Part of that is a mistake," asserted Lloyd Mallory calmly. "I lost ten dollars early in this term. I'd been leaving my money around in a bureau drawer all the year, but Miss Dutton told me I shouldn't. When I went to get it out the next day, to take it to a bank, as Miss Dutton advised, it wasn't all there."

"And you never told?" asked Mildred Wallace wonderingly.

"No," said Lloyd, "I thought,—as Nancy does about this robbery,—that I was to blame and ought to stand the loss. I see now that I owed it to others, if not to myself, to speak."

"Did many people know about the money's being there?" asked Margaret Lewis.

"Yes, a good many. You see it seemed so queer to me to lock money away—we never lock up anything out at the ranch—that I asked Kittie if it was customary to put comparatively small sums in the bank. Kittie asked me how long I'd had it around and why I hadn't spent it instead of keeping it so long; and she thought it was I who was queer—not Miss Dutton. So she spoke of it, and between us we discussed it a good deal."

"Yes, we did," agreed Kittie Westervelt. "Any girl here might have heard of it. And that was this term too. Two robberies since—in one term," ended Kittie, making her quick change of phrasing in response to a ferocious glance from Jane.

But smothering public opinion doesn't alter it. The only thing to do was to be kind to Jeanne, who could not help noticing the general coolness, and who clung pathetically, but in tactful silence, to her circle of defenders; and to hope that, if she came back in the fall, the trouble would be forgotten, and, if she went at once to teaching, it would not follow her.

Meanwhile there was Timmy to look after, when the crowded schedule of the baby-tending course gave you a turn. There were the mails to watch for, each fraught with a possible letter from Michigan and Mrs. Raftery. And there were the "possibilities" to hear and to discuss; for, though no mail brought Timmy news from his missing family, his wide choice of summer homes might have been envied by many babies who had never been stolen and then tumbled, by accident, into the midst of a girls' boarding-school.

The days crept slowly on until they made the week that Miss Marshall had fixed upon as a time limit. Still no answer from the Michigan advertisements.

"I hate to have that lovely ad. wasted," sighed Jane, "but anyhow we had the fun of writing it, and a baby-auction will be simply great."

"Jane!" protested little Christina. "You talk as if we meant to sell sweet little Timmy Lee."

"Well, don't we?" teased Jane. "The best bid buys him—for the summer and perhaps longer, if terms are found to be mutually satisfactory. The best substitute for home-and-mother that applies gets the finest baby going. What's that but a near-auction, may I inquire?"

The first day of grace allowed for a letter to reach Miss Marshall passed with no more exciting incident than the winning of the return match in

archery by Fair Oaks. But Vera did not compete, pleading a lame wrist as her excuse. She made a charming spectator, monopolizing the male onlookers and flirting with Tom Grant so outrageously that Miss Dutton, most lenient of chaperons, firmly attached herself to Vera,—who made the pretty little teacher as uncomfortable as she dared.

The last day of grace passed with no excitement whatever, unless you counted Christina Learned's having secured an unprecedented "perfect" on the term's algebra test.

That night at dinner Miss Marshall announced the "returns," or rather the absence of any—and appointed an Assembly under the Crooked Elm at four on the following afternoon, in charge of a managing committee of the girls, to plan for Timmy's future.

It was a perfect afternoon. Down by the lake Timmy frolicked in a patch of sunshine, shepherded by the doting, sorrowful Mary Ann. Mary Ann had begged "her dear lady" to take the baby to "Seldom Inn," where they were to spend part, at least, of the summer.

"I'll be that lonesome out there in the forest," sighed Mary Ann. "An' I'll be missin' the child so, I'll be down sick, most likely, and then who'll see after yez? Ye'll be sick too, and mebbe we'd both die out there in the woods by our own silves."

But Miss Marshall was deaf to Mary's pleas and unterrified by her threats of "lavin' yez," though she valued Mary Ann according to her high deserts. Perhaps she felt that an offer from her would embarrass the girls in a free choice. Perhaps she feared that she lacked what Cook called "a way wid babies." Perhaps she was afraid that Timmy would fall into Bubble Lake. Perhaps—and this was Nancy Lee's secret conviction—she was afraid of getting so fond of Timmy Lee Marshall that she couldn't keep her mind on Fair Oaks School. Whatever the reason, Miss Marshall did not offer to keep Timmy through the summer. Mary Ann's ingratiating hints about having him back in the fall she received in smiling silence. She was used to Mary Ann's efforts to direct her life.

The committee in charge of the Timmy Auction, as Jane had flippantly named it, being headed by Nancy Lee, was intent on fair play—first to Timmy, whose welfare was paramount to all other considerations, and then to the various persons who had offered a home to "the finest baby." The committee, being to a woman "crazy about Timmy," assumed a similar eagerness on the part of his would-be benefactors.

"They all want him dreadfully," Nancy had put it, "and they can't all have him, poor things!

Changes aren't good for little children, you see. So most of them—all but one, I suppose,—will have to be fearfully disappointed."

"Yes," nodded Margaret. "Wouldn't it be the fairest way to appoint some girl to speak for five minutes about each offer? Impress upon them that they must state the case just as strongly and just as fairly as they can. They must look at all sides and tell us exactly how it is. Because we all want to do the best thing for Timmy, regardless of any one's disappointment."

"Of course," agreed Nancy, thinking uncomfortably of one particular offer, which had been made to her personally. "I just can't tell her that she can't have him," thought Nancy sadly. "Well, maybe she'll get him," she encouraged herself, and thereat appointed Lloyd Mallory to represent Mrs. Barton in a five-minute speech. Lloyd wasn't eloquent like Margaret, nor clever and telling like Jane, but she could be counted upon to rise to an occasion, and she knew and dearly loved the Princess. She had seen the Castle. She could appreciate what a little child's life there would be, made happy by every pleasure and luxury attainable, and best of all by companionship with the Princess's merry heart and delicate fancy. It would be a sort of enchanted, fairy summer for Timmy, Nancy thought, if the Princess "got"

him. Of course, she was a frail little Princess; but her prolonged illness or absence would not interfere in the least with Timmy's essential safety or comfort. There would be the most reliable of nurses and servitors,—and there would be Dr. Jim. Of course Dr. Jim had also made an offer for Timmy; but if the Princess "got" him, her friend the Ogre would not let jealousy or disappointment affect his kindly oversight of the Princess and the Castle, or of his fond care of Timmy Lee Marshall.

"Besides, he wouldn't be so very disappointed," reflected Nancy; "if he had Timmy, he's too busy to see him very much. He'd probably send him and Nurse Boyne out to his farm to stay with Rob and Commander, and he'd go up for a day or two once in several weeks."

Margaret Lewis was to speak in Dr. Jim's behalf. Billy Bray and Carlene Marbury had promised to state two other offers, one from a friend of Mrs. Grant's, who wanted to adopt a baby boy, and one from an adoring schoolmate of Miss Marshall's, whose idea seemed to be to get Timmy off her idol's overfull hands. Nancy, to her horror, found that as chairman of the committee on the Timmy Auction, she was expected to preside over the affair.

"Well," she sighed, having at last yielded the

point, "I don't mind so much, because there's so little of this term left, and I don't suppose there'll ever be much more that we can do for Timmy. Of course he's sort of my baby. But next term I hope that whoever has an excitement drop down on her head, as Jane says, it won't be I. It's too much of a responsibility afterward."

"Responsibility is good for you, Miss I-Forgot," retorted Jane. "And you'll probably keep right on having adventures. Carelessness attracts excitement. Careful people get out of the way when they see an excitement about to drop,—and miss half the fun of life in consequence. That's why excitements hit you, N. Lee,—not because you deserve 'em."

The Timmy Auction was an orderly and serious gathering. The seniors were serious because they were so near to the good-byes that count. The rest were inspired by Miss Marshall's speech, still fresh in their minds and emphasized by Nancy's plea that this was a chance to "show that Miss Marshall hasn't been mistaken in trusting us with Timmy."

"We're supposed to learn how to think here," said Nancy solemnly, "especially in argument classes. I hope none of the speakers will forget to make fair concessions. For the benefit of the younger girls who haven't had argument yet, I'll explain that. It means that if your case has a

weakness, you'd better admit it, and then show, if you can, that it doesn't count as much against your case as some people might think. The girls who are to speak to us to-day have looked up their arguments carefully, and consulted Miss Marshall and Miss Cripps. They are going to try to make us see the advantages of each offer, so we can decide fairly; but they must also state the disadvantages, or we can't decide fairly for Timmy. Now, Billy—I mean Miss Bray—will you speak first? You must confine yourselves to five minutes, please. After the last speech there will be an open discussion, speakers limited to two minutes. Then Miss Marshall will give us a few suggestions. And then comes the vote. Now, Billy—Miss Bray." Nancy dropped blushingly on to the rustic bench which was "the chair" that afternoon.

Billy Bray spoke earnestly of the splendid home Mrs. Grant's friend could give Timmy, and of her sweet, motherly way; but the concession that Billy was forced to make practically threw her case out of court. The baby must be given unconditionally for permanent adoption. This, with even a faint possibility that Timmy's real family would appear to claim him, was clearly beyond the power of Timmy's self-constituted guardians to promise.

Carlene Marbury came next. Miss Marshall's friend would do all in her power for the baby until

noon of September twenty-first, at which hour she expected to leave her house to take a train for Boston and a boat for Naples.

"Goodness, she must be a prunes-and-prisms!" sighed Jane softly. "Fancy planning things as close as all that! I'll bet no excitement ever dropped on her head."

"She'd be regular about Timmy's meals and nap and bedtime," suggested Christina, "and maybe a baby like Timmy would stir her up and make her more ——"

"More human," suggested Margaret, who was sitting with the twins on the grass near Nancy's seat.

"I'd like to see her picture before we decide," said Jane. "Would you dare ask Miss Marshall for one?"

"I'm afraid not," said Margaret, scrambling to her feet, "but maybe she'll paint her picture for you in words, when she advises us."

Margaret took Jane's wish as the suggestion for her opening argument. The two ladies who had been spoken for were strangers; Dr. Jim was a familiar figure at Fair Oaks. Mary Smith knew best how nice he was—but Mary (the poor girl was blushing furiously) didn't like to praise him in public. Jane Learned knew too, and Nancy Lee, and Kittie Westervelt, and Vera Lawson, not to

mention Miss Dutton. But the committee had preferred to entrust his cause to a dispassionate person, whom no one could accuse of being unduly influenced by motor-car journeys in pursuit of tea with trimmings. Dr. James—Margaret grew suddenly more formal and more serious—had offered to send Timmy, under proper supervision—and no one was a better judge of what a baby needed than he—to his farm in the Berkshires. In the fall, if no legal claimants appeared, Dr. James would make another offer, based on any new conditions that might then arise. Other things being equal, he was ready to assume full responsibility for Timmy's up-bringing and education until he had attained his majority.

"Nineteen years," sighed Jane. "That's a lot to promise, but Dr. Jim is good for it. In nineteen years I'll be a frumpy old maid."

"Sh!" whispered Christina indignantly. "Margaret's going to concede."

"The only possible disadvantage that I have been able to see in Dr. James's offer," announced Margaret, with a twinkle, "is that he's a man and unmarried. If you think Timmy needs a mother more than a father, why, you may decide to reject this offer, unless ——"

And Margaret sat down amid a burst of applause and laughter, having cleverly indicated an inter-

esting "possibility" in the career of Dr. James, without having actually said anything that even Miss Cripps could definitely object to.

A little frightened by the fact that Margaret had made a "real speech" and been applauded so noisily, Lloyd rose to talk for the Princess. Her dark eyes flamed with eagerness and her face burned under its tan as she looked at the sea of faces and awoke to her responsibility. Fortunately she had learned the opening sentences, on the advice of wise Jane Learned, and in a minute they came back to her.

"Mrs. Carlton, Dr. James, and the rest will each give Timmy a good home. So will Mrs. Barton, —and she needs him. She is our friend, like Dr. Jim. One of us thinks of her as a fairy Princess, and all of us can see the appropriateness of the title. And who wouldn't love to spend the summer with a fairy Princess, in an Enchanted Castle, with Enchanted Gardens around it?"

Nancy gulped with joy because Lloyd was keeping the girls so quiet.

Lloyd went on to speak of Mrs. Barton's loneliness and of what Timmy would mean to her in the way of comfort. "I thought the other day that I'd ask father to let me take Timmy," said Lloyd simply, "but when I found that Mrs. Barton wanted him, I felt that there was the place for him."

Mrs. Barton, like Dr. James, Lloyd explained in concluding, was ready to adopt Timmy when the proper time came, and to educate him for any career he might choose.

"And the only concession I can think of," Lloyd added, growing suddenly shy and incoherent as the crisis she had risen to passed, "is something like Margaret's—only it's just the opposite. If Mrs. Barton takes Timmy, he won't have a father's care."

The hush that lasted after Lloyd sat down was as true a tribute as Margaret's applause. It was a thoughtful silence; the question was clearly between Mrs. Barton's offer and Dr. Jim's, and the balance swung between them, wavering this way and that as the hot discussion that followed the pause favored one or another of the claimants.

The chair had to "call time" on Mildred Wallace, and to refuse Jane Learned her third chance to speak; otherwise the debate would never have ended.

And yet Jane's first and briefest speech summarized the issue completely. "The question," Jane announced, "is this: Can Timmy get along without a mother best, or without a father? We all know how lovely mothers are,"—here Jane caught sight of Margaret's wistful face, and added quickly, —"or we have known so well that we shan't ever

forget. And we also appreciate our fathers. They say girls usually care more for fathers, and boys for mothers. But the Princess would be a pretty easy-going mother, and Timmy is awfully wilful, if he is only two. He's likely to be a handful, and motherless boys that are handfuls are as bad, generally, as fatherless ones. So there you are!"

Miss Marshall, in a very short speech, refused to throw her influence to either side of the debate. She complimented the girls on having emphasized the points at issue so clearly, and advised a secret ballot, to be delivered down by the boat-house, so that each girl might vote sincerely and not as her neighbors advised.

The result of the ballot was a tie. It was suggested that the teachers should cast deciding votes —as Miss Marshall declined to accept the whole responsibility of a choice. Nobody noticed, until after the extra ballots had been cast, that there was an even number of teachers present. The vote was still a tie. It was suggested that Mary Ann cast the deciding vote; but this plan was abandoned because it would offend Cook, and also because Mary Ann had not heard the arguments.

By this time the afternoon was gone, the dressing-gong had rung to empty corridors, and dinner would be waiting in a minute.

"Can't we put the matter on the table?" asked Carlene Marbury.

"What table?" demanded Christina audibly, before Jane could interfere.

"Is that a motion?"

"When shall we finish the Timmy Auction?"

"We can tell the defeated candidates the sad news right away."

"And what shall we tell the successful rivals? They thought it was to be decided to-day."

"Something may turn up to settle matters. But it can't! You just can't decide between fathers and mothers."

"Well, we've got to eat dinner now."

Plain Mary and Margaret promised to coöperate in a letter to Dr. Jim; and Nancy and Lloyd went to see the Princess.

"Was it between Dr. Jim and me?" she said, when the girls had broken the news gently and the Princess had insisted upon full details of the meeting. "How—how funny! I mean I don't wonder you couldn't decide. No, I mean why didn't you give him to Dr. Jim? Why, of course I'm not hurt or disappointed, Nancy dear! I'm—oh, I did want him! But perhaps Dr. Jim wants him more. Big, splendid men like Dr. Jim want things hard. And—you'd better give him to Dr. Jim."

Somehow, though she looked very small and

young and pathetic in her black dress, the Princess did not give the impression of being heart-broken about Timmy. Indeed she seemed to be very happy to-day in her odd, fairylike way.

"I shouldn't have known how to take care of him," she said, to comfort the girls more than herself, apparently. "You know I didn't know how to hold Prince Charming at first. But I learned. I did want to learn to take care of Timmy. My little baby—I never learned then. My husband always wanted me to travel about with him. And traveling doesn't do for babies."

"Oh, no!" chorused the girls.

"It's too exciting," added Lloyd.

"And you can't always get the right things for them to eat," contributed Nancy wisely.

"But I meant to care for Timmy myself. Nobody wants me to rush about now. I —— But I'd rather—truly I would!—that Dr. Jim had him."

The next morning before breakfast, Plain Mary Smith received a telegram from her guardian, who had made his offer regarding Timmy through her. "Offer absolutely and finally withdrawn. Mrs. Barton should have Timmy. I cannot think of competing with her. Thanks for writing me so fully. Shall be up next week."

"Aren't they dear about it?" said Nancy.

"They both want him so much that each is sorry for the other one."

"I'm going to suggest at the next meeting," said Mildred Wallace, who was the Princess's partisan, "that we give him to Mrs. Barton for the summer. A father won't count much while he's so little."

"Humph!" sniffed Jane, who was the Ogre's partisan,—half-heartedly because she loved the Princess too. "Neither does a mother count specially while he's so little. He can get along without a temporary mother, but he'll need a permanent one."

"I suppose he needs a permanent father just as much," sighed Mildred. "So how are we to settle it?"

"Oh, don't worry!" advised Jane. "It will settle itself. Things that you can't settle always do."

This discussion took place on the campus, and Jane, turning away to go to the archery field, almost ran down her friend Miss Cripps.

"We're talking about Timmy so hard that I never looked where I was going," Jane apologized cheerfully.

Miss Cripps was also going toward the archery field to find Miss MacPherson. "He's a dear baby," she said. "Do you know—I—of course it was quite absurd, but I actually wanted to take him—just for the summer. My sisters persuaded

me that I needed a complete rest. That's absurd too, but I couldn't give Timmy the advantages that Mrs. Barton or Dr. James can, so I gladly yield to them. But Timmy has made me hungry to do for children near at hand, that you can go to visit, and talk to, and play with, and love. I —I'm thinking of changing my Labrador charity for one among the poor of Boston."

"Don't give them red flannel petticoats," burst out Jane. "That is, I mean, Boston isn't as cold as Labrador, is it, Miss Cripps?"

"It's nearer," said Miss Cripps simply.

Jane abandoned her intention of taking part in the afternoon's archery contest to rush off and tell all her friends that "Crippsy had thrown over the poor of Labrador and was going slumming in Boston."

"No news from Michigan, I suppose?" she asked Nancy and Christina, who had been in to speak to Miss Marshall about a final bungalow-party for everybody, that the girls all wanted. Nancy and Christina wanted Timmy to go to the party; they feared that he missed the rustic life he had led in the woods with the kidnappers' caravan.

"I haven't heard of any," said Nancy sadly. "Jane, I don't see how we're to settle about Timmy. If change wasn't so bad for young chil-

dren we could divide him up—July with one, August with the other."

"And the rest of his life with the one he liked best," cut in Jane joyously.

"The trouble is he likes everybody best—when he sees them," complained Christina, ungrammatical but to the point.

"It's a puzzle," said Jane. "I say, girls, here's a dandy chance for the W. W.'s to get busy. Let's round them up and set them at it. Nothing but a real Wonder will settle the Timmy business so that we're all happy."

"The W. W.'s can't do anything," said Nancy Lee, "but perhaps it will cheer up Jeanne to have us hunt for her, and Grace will like to mull over Jane's silly idea about wonder-working, and try to puzzle out what it means. Sarah will ask a million questions, so let's leave her out for just this once. She's perfectly happy playing with the squirrels."

"And she's only a baby herself," said Jane. "She certainly works Wonders on squirrels, but she wouldn't understand this muddle."

"Do you know," began Nancy solemnly, "I almost wish that Mary Raftery would telegraph for Timmy to come at once, by parcel post."

"We couldn't trust you to do him up properly, Miss I-Forgot," taunted Jane.

CHAPTER XIX

A BOY AND A DOG

On a lovely June morning, while the summer arrangements for Timmy were still in abeyance, and at the hour when the Fair Oaks girls were all at chapel,—except Vera Lawson, who had reported a headache, and Plain Mary Smith, who had tumbled down-stairs on her way to chapel and gone back to bathe and bandage a damaged wrist,—a boy and a dog came briskly up Holly Road. They hesitated doubtfully at the school gate and then, both looking interestedly about them, slowly crossed the campus toward the dormitory. The dog went slowly because he was occupied in watching Sarah's squirrels. The boy did not notice the squirrels; his lagging feet seemed weighted with the thought of what he must say and do when he reached the door ahead of him.

He was a nice boy. Vera Lawson, if she had happened to look out her window, would have found him rather shabby, and objected to his hands, which showed marks of hard, rough work. Plain Mary, who, under Dr. Jim's kindly tutelage,

was learning to think an erect carriage quite as important as a slender figure, would have frowned at his narrow chest and stooped shoulders. And yet there was the glow of health on his thin cheeks, and there was a happy light in his eyes, in spite of the intent, almost grim set of his lips. Jane Learned would have remarked that mouth, finding it good-humored beneath its grimness. "No silly quarrels for him," Jane would have said. Margaret Lewis would have compared him to little Sarah Williston,—too old and too serious for his years; and Nancy Lee would have bestowed at least half her attention on the dog, trying to act old and staid and respectable and not succeeding at all because of those teasing squirrels.

"I'm glad he's got such a nice dog to frisk along with him," Nancy would have said.

But nobody saw the young-old boy and the old-young dog, as they came up the drive together.

"Lie down, nice fellow," said the boy at the foot of the steps, pointing sternly to a sunny spot of grass.

The "nice fellow" barked once sadly, and jumped up to lick his master's hands.

"Lie down, sir," commanded the boy sternly.

With an impish canine smile on his face, the dog trotted off after a particularly saucy squirrel.

"Lie down, sir," repeated the boy in a low, de-

termined voice that brought the dog running back to snuggle obediently down at his master's feet.

The boy stooped and patted his dog's pinkish-white forehead. "Lie still, old fellow, till I come," he said, and went on up the steps.

"May I see Miss Marshall? No, I have no card, nor do I know her, but my business is urgent—to her as well as to me."

The new parlor-maid left him in the pink-and-gold reception room, while she went to speak to Miss Marshall. As she could not, of course, interrupt the chapel service, she took time to go *via* the kitchen, and to tell Mary Ann and Cook that she guessed they'd lose Timmy now. When she had gone, followed by the well-feigned scorn of Timmy's adorers, Mary Ann slipped up to reconnoiter.

"Um," she reported to Cook. "'Tis only a slip of a lad, come to make love to some silly young gal, maybe. 'Tis not Timmy he's doin' business for, an' that new maid ain't got proper sense, to think as much." In which conclusions Mary Ann was later justified.

The new parlor-maid came back presently and took the boy to Miss Marshall's office, where he sat, huddled in a corner that was not visible from the half-open door, growing every minute more anxious about his errand.

Once a canine yelp from the campus made him

start nervously, but when he stood up to investigate he discovered that he could see the entrance through the window,—and his dog, not yelping but decorously pretending to be asleep in the sun. He smiled wanly then. There were girls outside the door, but the boy's only interest in them seemed to lie in keeping out of their sight. Once a scrap of the conversation that floated in brought him to eager attention.

"Headache," said somebody.

"Who?" asked a pretty, low voice. "Oh, Vera Lawson! Vera's always done up nowadays—always in the dumps."

"And cross!" added a shrill voice emphatically. "Snapping turtles have nothing on our Vera."

"Sh!" broke in a third voice. "The office door's open. Besides, Vera's ill; I'm sure she is. Nerves, you know. They always make people cross. Vera's naturally as sweet a girl as I ever knew."

They talked about a picnic next, at a place oddly named "Seldom Inn," but the boy was not interested in picnics. He sat with his eye on the closed door of the inner office, wishing—desperately wishing—that he could "get this over and go."

An hour later Miss Marshall came rushing out and frowned in annoyed surprise when she saw the strange boy.

"I'm sorry I forgot you," she said. "That new maid didn't leave your card where I should surely see it. Could one of my assistants—I'm very busy. Do I know you?"

The boy had risen quickly. Straightening his stooped shoulders, he faced Miss Marshall proudly across the empty office. "What I have to say is very short. I'm Vera Lawson's brother Robert. Vera wrote me of some trouble she was in." With a courtly gesture he asked permission to close the door, and then pulled forward a chair for Miss Marshall, who, with a bewildered "Vera? In trouble?" sank into it.

"I was afraid she wouldn't have told you," sighed the boy. "Not that she hasn't meant to," he added loyally, "but I suppose it's harder for girls to own up to things."

Miss Marshall nodded.

"I won't keep you waiting," he hurried on. "Vera took some money—approximately fifty dollars, I believe it was—from another girl's room. I've come to pay it back"—he dropped a roll of bills into Miss Marshall's lap—"and to ask you not to blame Vera too much, Miss Marshall. She wanted to return the money the minute she'd taken it, but she was afraid of being seen. She's been miserable ever since. She wrote me the very night it happened, and I advised her to go straight

to you. But when she wrote again, saying in rather a queer way that the matter had blown over, I wrote back—and then I thought I'd better just come." The boy straightened proudly. "I'm a year younger than Vera, but I've always looked out for her," he explained. "Maybe I've looked out for her too much ; but you see, Miss Marshall, I never thought that our lives would change as they have this year. I'm not sure that you know of my father's—failure." The boy hesitated over the word, and looked appealingly at Miss Marshall.

"Vera took the money that Nancy Lee had in charge—the girls' collection for their baby?" she demanded breathlessly. "I—can't believe it."

"Of course not," said the boy simply. "Vera is as straight and as true as—as any one. But this spring, for the first time in her life, she's been scrimped and pinched for money. She had run up a lot of bills before—the smash. She found for the first time that money couldn't be had for the asking, and—oh, I'm not making you understand. I don't believe I understand myself."

"No," said Miss Marshall, wearily. "But—go on, please."

"It's pretty hard, I suppose, for a girl to have to stand up to poverty—and—and disgrace," said the boy. "My father—we needn't go into that,

need we?" he begged pathetically, and Miss Marshall nodded swift agreement.

"And then it's been so sudden," the boy went on, with a grateful glance. "My mother has been splendid. We've tried—she and I—to make it as easy as we could for the others. We told Vera to come back and finish her year, and we've given her the same to spend as usual, because—we wanted to have her last term here happy. When I was in the hospital—I've been ill, you see, on top of everything—I couldn't write her, and—well, she took the money, Miss Marshall. I'm returning it for her, and—could I see her?"

There was an imperious knock on the door, and Miss Marshall opened it upon Vera Lawson. The boy sprang forward to meet her.

"I was just asking for you, Sister Ann," he cried joyously.

"Nancy Lee guessed that you were here," said Vera, smiling her softest smile at him. "Somehow she knew about your dog, and she saw the name on his collar."

The boy glanced out of the window anxiously. Commander was still lying in the sun, with only a wriggling tail to indicate that the owner of the white skirt whisking out of sight to an algebra class had been patting him in the way any dog loves.

"I didn't have to sell him," he said swiftly to

THE BOY SPRANG FORWARD

his sister. "Dr. Jim—I had to tell him a bit about my running off to see you—and he wouldn't let me sell Commander. He insisted that I'd earned thirty dollars in wages for my farm work, and the rest he advanced me. He's splendid, Vera! How can we——"

Vera turned swiftly to Miss Marshall. "I may as well say good-bye," she said. "Rob's told you, evidently. I can go home at eleven with Rob, and Billy Bray will pack my things to be sent after me. Oh, please don't look at me like that!" She turned to her brother. "You shouldn't have come here telling tales," she cried angrily. "I told you in confidence, and then asked you to forget it. And now you've——" Vera's shrill voice broke, and dropping into a chair she buried her pretty head on her arms.

"And now he's come, as your best friend would," Miss Marshall took up the story, "to make things right for you—and to make me understand."

"You don't! You couldn't!" muttered Vera in a smothered voice.

"Perhaps not wholly, Vera. Perhaps some time before you go home next week, after your graduation, you will come yourself and tell me just how it happened. But Robert has made me understand one thing: that you can't give up and run away just now. You've got to be ready to help

your mother and him to face the music. So far you've tried to muddle along, regardless of the new facts that you must meet. But now you're going to start over, and, if I were you, Vera, I'd begin by telling your friends exactly how things are."

"You mean I'm to tell them that I'm a thief?" Vera shot at her, and Rob walked over and put a comforting hand on his sister's shoulder.

Miss Marshall fingered Rob's bills suggestively. "The money has been returned," she said, "and I think that no one need hear anything more about it, except possibly Nancy, who has advanced the money ——"

"I'll tell her," broke in Vera. "She'll understand—she does foolish impulsive things sometimes."

"This was worse than foolish, Vera," corrected Miss Marshall. "It was wrong. But I don't know that speaking of it to any one—but Nancy, who must be reimbursed with this money—will make it any less wrong. And you need the chance of starting this new sort of life that will begin when you go home next week, with a clean slate. I want to give you this chance because I believe in you, Vera. Your brother says he's tried to look out for you ——"

"Always," declared Vera in a small, earnest voice.

"Well, now you're surely ready to begin looking out for him—or helping him look out for the rest. He's been ill, he tells me."

"Just a scratch that I got in a machine," deprecated Rob.

"And you're well and strong and ready to 'pitch in,' as I heard Jane Learned advising some one to do this morning. We must consider how you can help most when we have our long talk." Miss Marshall hesitated. "I may be able to give you a little real help," she added at last. "Suppose you plan to spend the Saturday and Sunday after graduation with me at 'Seldom Inn.' It's impossible to have real conversations or to think real thoughts in the hurly-burly of our last week." Miss Marshall turned with a smile to Rob. "You must stay for lunch. Have you heard about our baby? I thought Dr. James might have told you. Vera, drop classes this morning, and show off Timmy and all our lesser glories—the lake and the campus and your friends. Miss Dutton will be glad to chaperon an after-luncheon gathering in your rooms, so that your brother may see how we live here. I'll give you and any one you want to ask a free hour after luncheon. Thomas will drive your brother to his train."

Vera lifted her bowed head slowly and faced Miss Marshall with a wavering, watery smile. "You're

very kind," she said earnestly. "I wish I'd come to you myself and owned up. I want to own up to another thing. I hadn't a headache this morning. But I was worried and frightened and tired. I wanted time to think—and I called it a headache."

"Then you can really enjoy your free morning, perhaps," said Miss Marshall, looking from one to the other of the visitors.

Vera looked at Rob too, half-proud of him and half-critical of the shabby coat and the sunburned straw hat he had in his hand.

Rob noticed, and answered her criticism. "I'm a farmer nowadays, Vera, and I'm afraid I look it. I'd better rush off as I had intended."

But Vera wouldn't have that. "I want to hear all the news from home," she said, "and all yours and mother's plans. I must know them before I can arrange my summer—or have our long talk," she added to Miss Marshall. "I'll take you out in a canoe, Rob. I'm a very poor paddler, as you know, but we can drift mostly."

"We shall miss the canoeing at Hillcrest," Rob told her as they went off. "It's been sold at last—pretty well, too. I can't work indoors this summer, Dr. Jim says. I might stay on the farm, if you were really going home to stay. Was that what you meant, Vera?"

"Yes," said Vera.

No cool sea-breezes, no yachting trips, no August in the mountains, giving gay house-parties to her friends. A big town-house with one incompetent maid to keep it running! Vera's heart sank before the prospect, but if Rob liked being a shabby, wage-earning farm-boy as much as his shining eyes seemed to indicate, why, he should have his chance. It was like stepping nonchalantly into icy water up to one's neck, to say that unconcerned "Yes"; but perhaps new starts were always like that, Vera thought. And the having said it and meaning to stand by it made the visit to "Seldom Inn" seem at once less awesome. Among all her blunders and sillinesses, her concealments and snobbish deceptions, she would give Miss Marshall one little thing to approve of, and thus the visit would be easier for them both.

Dr. Jim would approve too. Vera blushed as she thought of his probable opinion of her.

"Did you really have to tell him, Rob?" she demanded wearily.

Rob nodded. "He gave me Commander for my own dog. But I couldn't go and sell him without explaining. And I couldn't get the money any other way that I could think of. He was splendid about it, Vera. He said that he knew and liked you, and that anyhow he'd do a lot for Mary Smith's friend and my sister; and he insisted that

the work I do is worth even higher wages than he paid me. I wish you'd talk to him, Vera, about what you're going to do, now that you're through school. He knows girls who do all sorts of interesting things to earn their livings, and enjoy it."

Everybody liked Vera's brother, from Timmy, who, gurgling with joy, rode on his back all over the campus, to Grace Allen, naturally haughty and a professed man-hater. And Commander was as popular as Rob. Nancy Lee had a splendid frolic with him, which made her quite homesick for her brother's collie pup. Dick's dog, being city-bred, did not understand the fine points of chasing chickens; but he chewed up furniture and other things in the house a little worse than Commander, Nancy declared. This friendly rivalry over their pets put Nancy Lee and Vera's brother at once on a footing of pleasant intimacy, and when he drove away with Thomas, leaving Vera and a bevy of her friends waving him off from the piazza, Nancy felt as if she were parting with an old friend.

It was hard work to go back and study for an hour—extra-hard, because that is the only honorable way to pay up for special privileges—and matters were further complicated for Nancy and several other girls by the spectacle of a messenger-boy trotting up the drive in the middle of the hour. That meant a letter or a telegram for some-

body. Was it bad news or good? And, above all, was it something about Timmy?

It was a "special delivery" for Miss Marshall, so the girls learned from the obliging Mary Ann, as they trooped out to the campus at half-past four. And in a minute Miss Dutton appeared, waving it in her hand, to summon them all to an informal "hearing," as she laughingly called it.

"It's really such an odd letter," she explained, "that Miss Marshall thought you would like to join her at once in guessing over it, and trying to imagine why it's so queer. Here it is: 'I see you have a baby's family to locate. Is he dark or light? Straight or curly hair? Pretty or homely? Bright and friendly or not? Where lost and where found, and with what persons? State what you know of his history.

"'This correspondence probably won't amount to much for either of us, but I thought I would write. No great hurry about replying.

"'Yours res'py,

"'JNO. SMITH.

"' *Camp Sixty-Nine,*

"' *R. F. D. 1, Pine Ridge, Mich.*

"'Come to think you might telegraph me a night-letter, if convenient, c. o. d., of course. I will send a man in to Pine Ridge to bring it out here. Mail is slow.'"

As Miss Dutton stopped reading there was a chorus of excited comment, ranging from, "He probably doesn't know anything about Timmy's family, but he wants a chance to adopt a nice bright baby," to, "Of course he's Timmy's father, or he wouldn't be in such a hurry."

"The queer thing about that letter," announced Jane Learned oracularly, "is that the ends don't match. It begins masculine and businesslike, and ends excited and feminine. Sh! She's going to read something else."

The other paper contained Miss Marshall's reply, submitted for the approval of the assembly.

"Coloring fair, hair wavy, bright, very friendly, attractive, not handsome ——"

Here a groan of objection was silenced by Margaret's explanatory, "She means his features are not classic." And Miss Dutton went on. "Probably lost Missouri, found Bubble Lake Station, Mass., May last, with woman attached to traveling caravan. Named, probably by woman, Timmy. Believed by her to be rich Missourian's son, held ten months for ransom. Age about two years. Picture follows."

"Which picture?" cried all the camera fiends in chorus. Timmy had obligingly posed for them all, and dozens of "snaps" of him hung on the walls or stood on desks and dressers at Fair Oaks.

Miss Dutton laughingly explained that Miss Marshall wanted them all to submit their most artistic and clearest prints for her to choose from, and the camera fiends, with airs of vast importance, dispersed to do her bidding.

The rest gravely passed a vote of approval upon Miss Marshall's telegram, after Mildred Wallace had suggested amending it by adding a summarizing, "He's just too cute for anything," and been crushingly advised that she evidently didn't understand the diction of telegrams.

"Besides, that doesn't answer any of John Smith's questions," added Margaret Lewis, "and it uses up several words. There are just fifty already, and John Smith, who may not be made of money, mightn't care to pay for more."

"Not in his practical, masculine mood," said Jane. "But when he's feeling excited and feminine, he'd love to hear that Timmy was 'too cute for anything.' He'd be willing to go without a meal to pay for those extra words. Meanwhile what and where is Pine Ridge, Michigan, and what sort of thing is Camp Sixty-Nine?"

Diligent study of the map of Michigan in the school's largest atlas revealed the facts that Pine Ridge was a town of six hundred population, not very far south of Saginaw, on a railroad line.

Hasty consultation of the atlas's account of Michigan's industries established the probability that John Smith was in the lumber business,—in exactly what capacity it was impossible to decide to the general satisfaction. Lloyd hoped he wasn't a chopper, because chopping down beautiful forests must make men cruel. Billy Bray, scrutinizing the handwriting of the letter, declared he didn't work with his hands; the writing was too neat and painstaking for an athlete's or a woodsman's. Somebody else thought he might be a government forester. It was finally agreed that, if he could send a man to the railroad, he must be in a fairly important post; and he was accordingly referred to as "the Boss" or "Boss Smith," as more picturesque and interesting designations than commonplace John Smith.

The evidences of John Smith's eccentricity received an important addition, when, early in the morning after the despatch of her telegram, Miss Marshall received an acknowledgment: "Thanks. You got everything in."

Either Camp Sixty-Nine was very near town, or else Boss Smith had gone in himself after the expected message.

Having acknowledged it, in a useless and tantalizingly non-committal message, John Smith did nothing more. Four days passed. It had been

decided to delay the final arrangements for Timmy until the last possible moment, and to make them at the last bungalow party, which Miss Marshall was giving as her annual farewell treat to her girls. So, to give Boss Smith as long as possible to write what he knew of Timmy or wanted with him, the bungalow party was postponed until the end of the last week. The seniors obligingly shifted their play to the earlier day originally reserved for the bungalow party. This really made an ideal arrangement, they decided; a day of irresponsible frivolity between the wearing strain of the play and class-day exercises on the one side, and the gravity of commencement and the wear and tear of packing on the other.

But on the day before the bungalow party poor Plain Mary was thrown into an agony of indecision and dismay by the receipt of a letter from her guardian. He was coming to pay his patient a much-postponed visit, and he wished to take the usual motoring-party for a final ride. Miss Dutton might perhaps be too busy to come, at this critical point in the year's work; but Mrs. Barton had promised to chaperon the party.

Sadly Mary sought help from the ingenuity of Jane and the sympathy of Nancy.

"Of course you must go to Miss Marshall's party," she said, "but what am I to do? Her

invitation came to me first, but there's no time to tell Dr. Jim, and I think I ought to stay and do my best to act as if I hated bungalow picnics. Of course I want to see him—I love to have him come to see me. But why did he choose to-morrow?"

Jane stared hard at Plain Mary, whose sorrow and confusion of mind made her look very plain indeed.

"Why, so Miss Marshall can ask him to the bungalow!" she cried. "I'll go and see her about it this minute, if you're too shy to propose it."

So it happened that the Ogre motored out to Fair Oaks, carrying Timmy Lee Marshall,—who was too small and too precious to be rushed around on stuffy railway-trains,—Mary Ann,—who could not be amicably separated from Timmy,—Miss Marshall, Plain Mary, Nancy, Jane, and the Princess.

Miss Marshall had asked the Princess to come too, because she deserved some return for all that she had done for Timmy and the girls. Besides, if one of the two bidders for Timmy was to be on hand at the end of the Auction, it seemed only fitting to ask the other. And both the guests of honor had accepted with a zestful promptness which assured Miss Marshall that her invitation was appreciated.

CHAPTER XX

DISCOVERED: THE REAL PRINCE

THE select motor-party, as Jane proudly called it, arrived at "Seldom Inn" just ahead of the "train-and-foot brigade." The Princess had not been so far from home since her illness, but she was not tired at all, she said, by the long ride. She rode in front beside the Ogre, looking distractingly pretty in a big gray ulster and a little gray hat, with a bunch of her favorite purple pansies for its only trimming.

"Even I could make a hat like that," sighed Jane admiringly.

"If you can, you'd better start a shop in New York, and make your fortune," jeered Nancy. "The person who trimmed that can make flowers look as if they grew on a hat, just as Lloyd has made her wild garden out here grow into the wood. That's millinery genius."

"Wish I had genius in some direction!" sighed Jane. "It looks so nice and easy."

"Lloyd worked hard and got very grubby," Nancy reminded her.

Jane grinned. "Don't I know! I'm—well, to speak modestly, a near-genius at understanding people. I can almost make them grow—in my head, I mean. And if you think that's easy, kindly try it."

Just then the rest of the party appeared, trooping down the short-cut path. Lloyd was ahead, walking with her easy swinging stride. At the edge of the clearing around the bungalow, she stopped and peered anxiously at something in the bungalow yard. Then, with a muttered, "I thought so!" she hurried on to find the Princess and Miss Marshall.

"Please come!" she begged. "My lady-slippers have blossomed for you."

It wasn't exactly a flower bed that she showed them. Under a scraggly, spreading pine, scattered about on the carpet of pine-needles, swayed and fluttered a dozen slender green stalks topped by dainty, pink-and-white "slippers."

"An old man that Miss Dutton and I met in the woods the day Timmy was found showed them to me," Lloyd explained, "and told me how to make them—happy in my garden—your garden, Miss Marshall. I'm so glad they've blossomed for to-day."

"You must tell me all about my—our garden, Lloyd," said Miss Marshall, smiling up at the tall,

eager girl. "If you don't, I shall be sure to miss something lovely. To think that we might all have missed these fascinating butterfly blossoms! They're not slippers; they're slipper fairies—like the fairies at Timmy's party."

"I've made you a map of the garden," explained Lloyd slyly, "with the dates when you ought to be looking out for things. But the dates aren't sure. I think the fun of a wild garden is in having to hunt for the flowers. I'm going to plant one all up and down Lost Canyon—out on father's ranch, I mean. I have a lot of plants from these woods 'heeled in' down by the brook," —she waved at the wood behind the bungalow— "that I'm going to take home with me. I think they'll grow in Lost Canyon, if Pete and I coddle them a little at first."

The Princess was delighted with Lloyd's garden map. "I shall make one of my gardens, to look at in the winter when the snow has covered the beds, and I'm lonely. Then I shall take out my map, and plan new borders and new color-schemes for the spring. And when I have to add new countries to my garden map, I shall be as proud as an arctic explorer, and much happier. Some time, Lloyd, will you hunt me one fairy slipper for my wild garden—just one—to remember to-day by?"

After inspecting the garden, some of the girls walked up the brook to a tiny cascade that Miss Dutton and Lloyd had discovered, and others went as far as they had time for on the wandering, fascinating path to Little Bubble. Nancy was one of these, for she wanted to find the fork where she had been lost the other time. The twins and Lloyd, too, chose this path, Jane promising to show Lloyd the swamp where they had seen one tiny yellow lady's slipper the other day. This time Nancy Lee kept a strict eye on her watch, which she had made sure, before starting, was exactly right; and she insisted upon turning back even before the others thought it really necessary.

"Something might happen," protested Nancy wisely.

"Yes," cried little Jeanne, who had come with Lloyd, "it seems a cinch to get back, but the boy he don't always guess right the very first time."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Jane Learned excitedly. "Where's Nancy Lee? Now, N. Lee, will you preach to me about keeping Mademoiselle Durand's English pure and undefiled? All these months I've skulked in the offing, out of her hearing, because I'm too slangy to associate with her. And listen to the results! Hereafter I shall thrust myself in her path. I shall babble cheerfully in her presence. I shall teach her the newest rag-

time songs and the latest jists from Broadway—because if I don't somebody else will."

Vera Lawson and Kittie came up just in time to hear this absurd speech and to translate it glibly to Jeanne, whose face lighted as she understood the real motive behind Jane's seeming unfriendliness.

"You know now why I suggested such a silly thing," Vera whispered to Nancy. "It was when I believed in the château and all that. I wanted to keep Jeanne to myself,—to be first with her,—and I thought that if the twins were intimate with her, they might break up our friendship."

"Well, it really didn't do any harm," said Nancy comfortingly. She was more sorry for Vera than ever, since the interview with Miss Marshall that had ended in the restoration of the amount of the Timmy collection. Before that, her sympathy had been only a vague response to Vera's discontent and restless unhappiness. But now she knew just where that discontent and unrest had led Vera, and she could guess how hard these last days at Fair Oaks must be for her. And nobody else knew or guessed—not even the omniscient Jane.

Before lunch Kittie Westervelt surprised her friends and sent the head of the Fault Factory off to the trellised piazza, there to indulge in a triumphant "cavorting of the Frabjous Tortoise without

his shell, poor dear!" What Kittie did was merely to demonstrate her changed spirit by asking of Miss Marshall the privilege of washing the luncheon dishes.

Jane would have been driven to going through her Tortoise Dance a second time if she had known Kittie's motive in making her offer.

"I'll get ahead of Jane Learned for once," Kittie had decided. "If I offer to wash dishes, Jane can't plan it. To be sure, I shall have to wash the dishes just the same, but I shall get ahead of Jane."

Lloyd was a loyal helper to her roommate, scouring tins before she handed them to Kittie to rinse out, and scraping all the dishes so neatly that Kittie's labors were lightened by half. As for Jane, she showed her admiration of Kittie's energy by making the whole party, not excepting the guests of honor, use as few dishes as possible for their meal.

"Let our motto be: 'We live to eat but not to wash dishes,'" declaimed Jane. "It rests with the educated woman—that's us—to simplify the drudgery of living so that she can have time to—oh, to vote, of course," ended Jane with a chuckle, "or else to be an anti, just as she pleases. But she can't do either intelligently if she's a household drudge."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Billy Bray. "How

many dishes did we wash and wipe during our senior Saturday party out here? It was over three hundred, wasn't it, Vera?"

Vera nodded. "And we thought it would be a good thing if every girl could have a little house of her own to manage for a while—for fun, before she had to manage one in earnest. Then she would know about the work involved in housekeeping."

"And the servant problem would be on the way to a fair solution," put in Miss Marshall quickly.

"It would be great to learn to do things in your own little house," said Nancy, resolving to have one, and soon, though the ways and means of so doing seemed at present very far off.

"You shall have one, Mary," the Ogre promised his ward smilingly. "Say the word, and I'll build you a house-in-the-woods on my Berkshire farm. And as soon as you've learned to make good corn-meal griddle cakes and coffee, and mastered the crisping of bacon, I'll come and spend a day with you."

"Oh, thank you!" said Plain Mary, divided between anticipation and dismay. Mary's orphaned childhood had left her nothing to lean upon in a housekeeping experiment, save the Domestic Science courses of one or two boarding-schools; and Mary was sensible enough to recognize the

practical gaps in this theoretical training. But all the girls were envying her noisily, and some time of course she might have to keep house on a grown-up scale—perhaps Dr. Jim might even want her to do it for him. So dizzying bliss and awful responsibility fought for the possession of Plain Mary, until Nancy Lee leaned over and whispered, "There's a nice old caretaker at that farm. Vera's brother told me so. She'll help you." And at that, dizzying bliss triumphed.

After luncheon it had been decided that the business of the day should be transacted. The guests of honor tactfully withdrew to inspect the beauties of the Bubble Pond trail, the Princess declaring that she felt quite equal to rivaling Nancy's proud achievement in mountaineering.

Then, after they had gone off on the supposition that the business was to be transacted at once, Kittie Westervelt burned her finger over the teakettle, in a final effort at tidying up the kitchen; and before she had been revived and bandaged, Timmy walked into the lake. He had wet only his feet and his skirt bottoms, when Mary Ann, who had been rendering first aid to the injured Kittie, spied her darling in danger and ran shrieking to rescue him. But Timmy shrieked too in sympathy, and the building up of a roaring fire, to make him a hot drink and dry him off by, with

subsequent discussions of what might have happened to the Finest Baby, took time. So, just as the Timmy Auction had finally convened on the piazza, Jane Learned, who had sharp eyes, discerned the Princess and the Ogre walking, in blissful unconsciousness of observers, back down the winding trail from Little Bubble. Perhaps the Princess was tired, though she did not look it; at any rate the Princess and the Ogre were walking hand in hand, exactly like two happy children.

When they observed their nearness to civilization in the shape of "Seldom Inn," they advanced in a more conventional manner; but the contented look of happy comradeship remained on their faces, and somehow it made everybody on the piazza stop talking to smile at the gay little Princess and the tall, handsome Ogre, who looked down at her with such an anxious, protecting air, when her foot tripped on a gnarled root just as she came close to the piazza.

"Well," demanded the Princess, to fill the little expectant pause, "have you decided all about the darling baby?"

"We haven't decided anything, because ——"

All talking at once, they burst into a flood of explanation about Kittie's finger and Timmy's attempt to go swimming in the lake.

"The darling!" cried the Princess. "Let's go

in and play with him, Dr. Jim, while they decide between us." Suddenly a soft pink flush spread over the Princess's face. "We're making them a lot of trouble for nothing, aren't we? Perhaps we'd better tell them. That is, if you're sure ——"

The look the Ogre gave her in response assured everybody present that there was at least one thing he was perfectly sure of. "Tell them by all means," he said gravely.

"Well, then," the Princess turned to face her audience, which was fairly on tiptoe with excitement and curiosity, "well, then,—first let me be quite sure that I understand how you girls feel. As I understand it, you think I might be a good enough mother for your baby; but you think he also needs a father."

Murmurs of assent from the audience.

"And of course you think Dr. Jim would be a perfectly splendid father; only a baby needs a mother too."

More murmurs, and Mildred Wallace made them articulate by chirping, "We really want you both to have him."

"Splendid!" cried the little Princess joyously. "Because that's what we want you to do. Give him to us both."

"But how can we?" pursued Mildred solemnly. "Because changes are bad for little children. He

couldn't keep moving back and forth from one of you to the other; and he mustn't be forever having new nurses."

"Or different milk to drink," contributed little Christina, and was prodded violently by Jane, who, as usual, had put two and two together, and understood exactly how matters stood.

"No, of course he couldn't," smiled the Princess, undismayed by these glaring obstacles to her plan, "and he wouldn't have to. Because you see, I'm—I'm going to be married to Dr. Jim—tomorrow morning, in my garden. And then—everything will be all right."

It would! The Timmy Auction resolved itself into an uproar of congratulations, with an undertone of romantic satisfaction, reveled in as only girls in their teens can revel in romance. Finally, having bestowed Timmy upon the guests of honor, as the most valuable, delightful, and beautiful of wedding gifts, the Auction adjourned, with but one regret.

"They don't either of them need him so much now," said Margaret Lewis, "because they have each other; and Timmy doesn't need our money. He'll have more than is good for him, maybe, without it."

"Well, that means we must find another Timmy, doesn't it?" said Nancy. "And choosing him will be fun."

"Another Timmy!" objected Christina plaintively.

"Never mind, Christina," said Jane. "We contributed only sixty-six cents for 'another Timmy'! We ought to be able to find a child that's worth sixty-six cents to the Terrible Twins."

"In all, though, we have a lot of money," said Margaret Lewis thoughtfully, "and we have pledged ourselves to all the givers to see that it goes to help a worthy baby—though all babies are worthy, aren't they, poor little mites! Well, you know what I mean. Now how are we going to choose the new baby?"

"Not by a general caucus," declared Billy Bray, who had joined the group. "It's too difficult. Some would insist on dark hair, and some on blond curls. Kittie Westervelt would rule out bow-legged babies, Christina and Nancy would base their choices on 'cuteness,' and Jane and I should select the forlornest, raggedest, homeliest baby in the lot, shouldn't we, Jane? Only I shan't be here to help choose," added Billy, with a wistful sigh.

"You must come back next fall for the choosing," said Jane. "Only, as you say, we mustn't have one, because it mightn't end as wonderfully as the Auction has."

"We could leave it to Miss Marshall," suggested Margaret.

"Oh, why not leave it to Miss Cripps?" cried Nancy. "She'd love to choose us a baby."

"She'd probably choose my kind," warned Billy. "Forlorn and scrawny and cross-eyed."

"But she'd have such a glorious time doing it," urged Nancy. "And she needs it—the fun and the interest. She's not like Mrs. Barton and Dr. Jim, who've got each other. I can't really feel that we ought to have given her Timmy, but we can give her the chance to choose us a new Timmy. Let's!"

"All right," said Jane. "I'll push her candidacy, N. Lee, and you know what that means. I say, isn't Timmy in luck, though, to get both those two to look out for him—and spoil him, probably. And great hat, girls! Think of Plain Mary's luck! Mrs. Barton will be her guardianess."

"I wonder if she's thought of that," said Margaret, who remembered that Plain Mary's face had been rather sober when the Princess made her astounding announcement.

But if Mary had descended from her pinnacle of dizzying bliss over the little house she was to have, to a depth of "gone" feeling, because her adored guardian was going to be married and would soon have no more thought to spare for her—if Mary had felt that way just at first, by the time her

friends confronted her with Jane's cheering suggestion, Mary was for a second time up on her pinnacle.

"The Princess has asked me to visit her for all summer," she confided to them joyously. "Think of that! And she's promised me a pink chiffon dress like Vera's. She said I could have anything I wanted most, and I've always wanted one lovely, becoming dress."

"Now you've got a guardianess, you can have all your dresses pretty and becoming," said Nancy. "It's just as easy as the other way."

"Only of course," warned Jane Learned, "they won't always turn out the way you've dreamed of having 'em, even for a guardianess or a fairy godmother." Jane knew how the things that looked lovely in fashion-books always looked lovely on Christina, but were "frights" on her; and she couldn't bear to have Plain Mary confront herself in a dress modeled on Vera's, without a hint that it mightn't look quite the same.

"Tickled pink, isn't she?" whispered Jane to Nancy, and gave Mary one more warning, this time a joking one in the interests of the Fault Factory. "Mary," she said, "judged by the fairy parties, the eats at the Castle are rather extra good. Don't make too many exceptions to the rules for becoming an airy fairy sylph. I shall require you

to give an account of yourself in the fall, and if you're caught losing your desire to please the Ogre by your slender, phantom-like appearance, I shall christen you Puff-ball—sure as anything. So consider the rotund mushroom and be warned in time."

Just as it was time to go home, little Sarah appeared at Nancy's side with a bottle full of water and wriggling tadpoles.

"See, Nancy dear? Aren't they dear little ones? I thought I'd get some to take home. It will be fun to see them lose their tails and get their legs. Besides, Annette will like to watch them swimming around inside the glass. Do you s'pose the Princess would like some for Prince Charming? 'Cause I've got plenty to give him some—for a kind of a wedding present, you see."

Nancy laughed heartily. "Don't you think they'll be rather messy to take home to Annette, dear? And aren't you afraid they'll be unhappy in a bottle, when they're used to having the whole brook to play around in? If we were to go and put them back, I'm sure they'd dance on their tails for joy. Let's do it."

When the tadpoles had been returned to their native element, Sarah looked up into Nancy's face solemnly. "Tell me again, Nancy, 'zactly what's an ogre."

Nancy explained gravely, while Sarah nodded vigorous comprehension.

"Then it was awfully silly of Jane to name him that—Dr. Jim, I mean," announced little Sarah emphatically. "I knew it was wrong, 'cause the ogres in the stories never marry the princesses. The prince comes along and kills the ogre and then he marries the princess his own self. But in our story the Ogre is the prince, and what can Prince Charming be?"

"Why, he's another prince," explained Nancy, "only he doesn't marry the Princess. He just drives away the bad fairy, and looks out for her in all kinds of ways, and keeps her cheered up and happy, until a splendider prince comes along, looking like an ogre. And the splendider prince is Dr. Jim."

Sarah sighed. "I should be awful sorry for Prince Charming if he wasn't a kitten," she said.

That night the W. W.'s held a final meeting in the Unmixed Study. There were no lessons to learn, except an extra algebra test for poor Christina. But Christina was much too sleepy to study, and the other W. W.'s were too tired, after the long day out-of-doors, to be very energetic in the matter of coaching her. They kept at it doggedly, nevertheless, until poor Christina, having bathed her face for a third time in cold water and gone over

her formulas once more, declared in an awestruck voice that she really did understand now.

"Well, that's the wonderfulest Wonder we're likely to achieve in many moons," sighed Jane, to whom the slower processes of her twin's mind were shrouded in mystery. "Now we'd better ratify the Wonder that has dropped on us out of the sky. Of course mere human Wonder Workers needn't expect to succeed where a Prince, a Princess, and an Ogre—misnamed by me—not to mention an Enchanted Castle and Fairy Gardens, are concerned. So I move that, as the W. W.'s didn't work a Wonder for Timmy they ratify the Wonder that ——"

"That love worked," Margaret Lewis took up the tale.

"Weren't you awfully surprised?" asked Grace Allen. "Or perhaps you girls who knew them better had noticed something."

"No indeed," cried Nancy. "You could have knocked me over with a feather when Mrs. Barton told us."

"And me too."

"Same here," repeated all the older girls.

Little Sarah had listened with solemn interest to the conversation, occasionally demanding whispered explanations from Nancy or Christina—her two favorites.

Now she stared in scornful amazement from one "big girl" to another, who had confessed amazement at the Princess's announcement.

"Umph!" she shrilled at last. "I wasn't surprised. I knew all the time how it would be! Do you s'pose I didn't guess the Ogre was only Prince Charming without his disguise"—Sarah stumbled bravely over the queer word. "I may be little, but I understand 'bout fairy stories, and I see you others don't. And to-day I asked Nancy all about ogres, to be sure I was right."

"Am I interrupting?" Plain Mary stuck a radiant face in at the door. "Girls, if you were going to a wedding to-morrow morning,—and had my clothes,—what would you wear?"

"Umph!" shrilled Sarah again. "I c'n guess that too! I know what wedding you mean, Mary Smith." And the smallest W. W. hopped contentedly off to bed. But the sight of a note on her dresser, inviting her to the Princess's wedding at half-past seven the next morning, sent young Sarah hastily back in search of Nancy.

"Oh, you have an invitation too!" she piped, at sight of Nancy busily reading her note. "Does yours say half-past seven too, Nancy? Isn't that a funny time to be married? Is Plain Mary going to wear her bestest dress? I am. And I'm going to take a bestest bow over for Prince Charming,

'cause maybe the Princess wouldn't think to have one ready."

"I'm almost through being on probation," Nancy wrote in the Red Journal that night. "Just one more day and a morning. I don't believe they count, either, because it's impossible to pack without some confusion, and everybody has begun already except me. I was forehanded once, and that was enough for me.

"Vera says the Princess was married to Mr. Barton when she was seventeen, and he was killed the day her little girl Alice was born—his riding horse threw him. That was seventeen years ago, Vera says. I think the Princess is going to be very happy, and Dr. Jim, and Timmy. To think how I wished Mary Raftery would send for him—just because that would settle it all easily, and now it's settled easily and splendidly too.

"N. B. I just happened to think that maybe Timmy's mother is lying awake this minute, crying for her darling baby. But of course you can't tell. As Miss Marshall said, we've done our very best to find her, and that's all we can do. I'm going to remember that. I guess the first part—about doing your very best—is what I'm likely to need. Still, I do worry sometimes, and it's always foolish—if you've done your very best first."

CHAPTER XXI

HOME AND MOTHER FOR TIMMY

THE three original Real Girls and Plain Mary, all in what Sarah called their "bestest best," met at twenty minutes past seven under the Crooked Elm, and went over to see the Princess married to the Splendidest Prince among her roses. Sarah looked a little pensive during the ceremony, because Prince Charming had carelessly hidden from her under the piazza, and could not, therefore, be decked with the enormous bow of pink ribbon that she had tucked into her sleeve for him and then carried, hanging over her shoulder, to the other Prince's wedding. But when it all was over, Sarah whispered to Nancy that if there wasn't any more to being married than that, she guessed Prince Charming wouldn't mind missing it.

"Why did you get up so early to have such a tiny little short wedding?" Sarah demanded curiously, when it was her turn to go up and kiss the Princess.

The Princess laughed merrily. "So the dew could come to my wedding, little Real Girl. My roses are never so lovely as early in the morning.

Come and see!" The Princess led Sarah from one blossom-starred bush to another, and all the buds and flowers, fresh and sparkling after their night of dew, justified the Princess's account of their morning loveliness.

"And now we ought to be going," said Nancy at last, catching little Sarah as she skipped by in fresh pursuit of Prince Charming.

"Oh, but you're to stay for breakfast," the Real Prince assured her earnestly. And the Princess said of course they were to stay. Hadn't she put it in the notes? Well, she knew Miss Marshall would understand it that way, but to make quite sure John should telephone.

So the original Real Girls and Plain Mary sat down with the Prince and the Princess to a wedding breakfast that began with luscious strawberries and whipped cream and went on through "birds' nests" (which are only eggs, beaten and then baked to look like a whitey brown nest with browny-yellow eggs in it, built on a slice of toast) and the most delicate marmalade, also on toast, to waffles and maple syrup. Prince Charming sat on the floor between the Princess and little Sarah and lapped cream out of a silver bowl, until even his greedy little kittenship could lap no more. So then he jumped into little Sarah's chair, which was much too big for her, and snuggled down between

her and the chair-back for a morning snooze. Therefore little Sarah sat gingerly on the very edge of the chair, and ate waffles very slowly and carefully for fear of tipping over. Thus was Prince Charming, with his usual fairylike gifts for looking after his friends, the means of keeping little Sarah from eating herself sick over that delicious wedding breakfast.

"We're all dressed for the graduation exercises," announced Nancy happily, when at last, with promises to come again in the fall—except Plain Mary who was moving over to the Castle the very next day—the girls finally took their leave. "If there's any time left before the exercises," added Nancy, "I'm going to pack—or get ready to. If I put all my clothes in nice tidy piles on the bed this morning, I can tuck them into my trunk this afternoon in next to no time, and perhaps Mary Ann will let me take Timmy for a walk, instead of some girl who has a turn, but is too busy."

The course in baby-tending had formally ended a few days before; but Timmy's particular admirers and most devoted slaves continued their tending whenever opportunity offered.

"I thought perhaps I could help Mary Ann move him and his things over to the Castle," explained Lloyd shyly. "That is, if he moves tomorrow."

"He's going to," Nancy assured her. "And somebody will certainly have to help. Mary Ann couldn't manage Timmy and his pram and his high chair and all his clothes and things. And she'll be too busy to care about running back and forth very many times. Oh, dear, I guess I'll plan to try to help too—if you don't mind, Lloyd."

"Of course I don't," Lloyd told her. "Anything is twice the fun if you do it too, Nancy."

The dormitory seemed very quiet as the three girls, having left Mary at the Junior Cottage, entered it. But little Sarah scurried off to her room, and Lloyd and Nancy climbed to their floor unsuspectingly. The twins were out; Nancy laughed at Jane's packing, which already, in its initial stages, was "all over the place."

"We had such a good time, Grace," she called, disappointed at not finding the twins there to listen to her account of the wedding. Grace wasn't at home either. Her little bedroom was in perfect order, but somehow Nancy had a feeling that Grace had left it suddenly and in a hurry. A tipped-over pile of handkerchiefs on the bed and a petticoat drifting limply off a chair, spelled, in Grace's room, as much turmoil and excitement as did Jane's "all-over-the-place" packing in the Unmixed Study.

Vaguely disturbed by the lack of opportunity for conversation when she was fairly bursting with news of the wedding, Nancy wandered back to her own quarters and began a desultory attack on the contents of her bureau. She had pulled out all her shirt-waists, and reviewed despairingly the heterogeneous contents of her upper drawers, before she gave up her efforts.

"I feel as if something was going on somewhere," she thought. "Maybe all our watches and clocks are slow and it's time to go to the chapel-hall to see the seniors graduate. I'm going to find Lloyd, or somebody. I can't bear to miss the very last good times of this lovely, exciting spring term." With which declaration of her intentions, Nancy ran off down the silent, echoing corridor in search of Lloyd. At the head of the stairs she beheld a friend: Cook, fat and completely winded by her long climb up two flights of stairs, waved wildly and quite incoherently at Nancy, with a gesture that seemed half to beckon and half to warn her away. Nancy decided to stand her ground and see what happened next. Meanwhile Lloyd, hearing steps in the hall, remembered vaguely that there was something to go to that morning and came out to ask for details. Lloyd had not been troubled by the silence or the lack of companionship; instead she had felt very

much at home and had worked so busily that her small trunk was practically packed already.

At sight of Cook's fat, waddling figure, making signals of distress, she stopped, as Nancy had done, to await developments.

"Shure, I'm sent for yez," wheezed Cook, when she had recovered her breath. "That new parlor-girl, she was posted at the door to tell yez. But she got cryin' 'bout the babby, pore thing, and so she kem down to be cryin' wid me. An' betwain us we fergot yez. Hustle along now to yer gymnasium, an' ye'll hear th' awful, awful news!"

"Oh, Cook, what is it?" demanded Nancy, her gray eyes round with terror.

"Is somebody hurt or dead?" asked Lloyd solemnly.

"Might as well be," moaned Cook, rolling her eyes mournfully. "It's little Timmy as——"

Nancy gave a gasp of horror, and Lloyd turned deadly pale under her tan.

"As is goin' to be tuk from those—as—luv—him," sobbed Cook. "I don't know the rights uv it at all, but his ma's wrote—or his pa's telly-phoned, an' he's goin' out to Michigan. An' what'll become uv me an' Mary Ann?" Cook wiped her eyes on her sleeve and faced her bewildered audience with the proud air of a martyr defending his cause.

"Is his mother Mary Raftery?" demanded Nancy swiftly. Then, observing Cook's tendency to lapse into the use of inchoate gestures, she caught Lloyd's hand and started with her down-stairs. "Thank you a thousand times, Cook, for remembering us," she called back. "We'll find out the 'rights of it all,' and we'll come back and tell you. Sit down in my study and rest."

Arrived at the gymnasium, the two spent but a minute in getting Cook's vague story confirmed. Timmy's mother had written, and she was Mary Raftery. "Jno." Smith had telegraphed, and he said that Mary Raftery was, beyond a doubt, the mother of the Finest Baby.

In another minute Nancy, dragging Lloyd after her, was explaining to Miss Marshall why they had not come sooner, and Miss Marshall explained to Nancy, in return, how, having received the letter and the telegram directly after breakfast, she had decided to lay them before the school at once, before the seniors' friends should arrive for the graduation exercises.

"Here are the documents," she ended smilingly. "Read those and then you will have caught up with the rest of us, and we can go on with our deliberations and arrangements."

They read the letter first. It came first, Jane Learned explained over their shoulders.

"And it's not a letter," said Jane. "It's a cry of joy, a hymn of praise, and—well, I know what I mean, but I can't say it. Just read for yourselves."

This is what Mary Raftery wrote, from Camp Sixty-Nine, R. F. D., Pine Ridge, Michigan:

"Joy be my baby's found! I'll have something to live for now, and so will you that gave him back to me. How I'm to get the darlin' I can't think, but if you'd send him by the quare new mail, would he be comin' safe? I heard they do send babies that way.

"I was working for Mr. Sefton, and it was his baby they meant to take—never my poor little Timmy. They were just of an age, those two, and I used to take care of his all the day, and run back to me own come night. My husband's young sister done for him the whiles I must be gone.

"Mr. Sefton blamed me when those people tried to steal his Joey. He's a hard man. He gave me a day to get away in, or me and my man would be jailed, he said. He promised fair and square to have Timmy searched for by the police, but I'm thinking he never done it. He was afraid, mebbe, they'd put it in the papers and somebody would try to steal Joey again, if he offered a reward for my baby. Besides, if he thought I was in with that gang, and the stealing of Timmy was just a blind, to persuade him I was straight,—why of course there wa'n't no reason for him to be hunting Timmy for me.

"Mrs. Sefton was sick then. She never knew Timmy was taken. If she had, she'd have helped me, no matter what the old man said.

"I'm cook to this camp, and the boss he saw your ads. and knowing of my trouble he wrote. My husband and I, we read the letter you send back, and we hoped. But when we seen the pictures, specially the one where he's layin' on the grass and smilin'—then we knew.

"All the facts corresponds. His real name is Timmy. The gypsy woman heard my husband's sister call him that when she went in a store to trade. She got Timmy mixed with Joey mebbe, or mebbe she'd seen me wheelin' Timmy on my afternoon out, and knowin' I was the Sefton nurse she got in wrong.

"Oh, I want my baby so! Could you send him some way, and we'll work us to the bone to pay you back!

"MARY RAFTERY.

"And me too.

"PATRICK RAFTERY."

This letter "Jno." Smith had supplemented with one of his absurd messages with the blunt, masculine beginning and the feminine, finicky close,—the whole evidently delayed for some inexplicable reason and then hastily despatched by wire.

"Mary Raftery honest, reliable, thrifty, good woman, good mother. Witnessed her identifica-

tion of photos, and am sure, after long questioning, no mistake possible. Patrick good fellow, but Mary man of family. Will gladly defray expense, you or your messenger and child, Fair Oaks to this place. No great hurry.

"JNO. SMITH."

On a second yellow sheet was written only:

"Could meet Saturday's train, making happy Sunday for the Rafterys.

"SMITH."

"Isn't he nice and comical!" sighed Nancy.

"And isn't she pathetic!" added Lloyd.

"Oh, I do hope she's nice!" said Nancy. "And what does she mean by the 'quare new mail'?"

"The parcel post, silly!" explained Jane, bobbing up again at Nancy's elbow. "Haven't you seen wild newspaper yarns of mailing babies by it? Not for any long distances, though, like from here to Michigan."

"Of course we couldn't trust Timmy to any 'quare new' thing," said Lloyd solemnly. "But what can we——"

She stopped, because Miss Marshall was asking what she should reply to Mrs. Raftery and "Jno." Smith.

"We don't know much about him, and I think we ought to be sure they're not trying to steal back Timmy," suggested some one.

That, Miss Marshall explained, had been attended to. Oddly enough, Miss Dutton's best friend at college had married a lumber man, with large interests in Michigan. That very morning Miss Dutton had received a note from her, dated at Pine Ridge; and already Miss Dutton had telegraphed for "Jno." Smith's credentials. In case they were satisfactory, he ought to be regarded as a good voucher for Mary, and Timmy must go home.

"Maybe he'll be happiest there," chirped Mildred. "He can play in those big woods, and he can go to college with the money we'll raise for him, if the Rafterys can't send him. And some day he can be President. According to the stories you hear, poor boys have a better chance than rich ones to be President."

"And to be happy," smiled Miss Marshall. "No, we needn't pity Timmy, I think. And Dr. James and his wife can be happy without him. Now how shall we send Timmy to his mother?"

Lloyd Mallory, who had been whispering eagerly with Margaret Lewis, stood up suddenly. "Let us Western girls take him home with us to-morrow," she said. "Margaret and I needn't go far

out of our way. We'd try very hard to take good care of him."

"And we shouldn't be wasting his money," added Margaret practically. "We'd love to do it, Miss Marshall, if you and the others think you could trust us. But if not—I think we girls want to pay the traveling expenses ourselves, because it's a sort of ending to his visit here; and Mr. Smith can do something else later on, if he wants to."

"We can trust you to look after Timmy, all right," retorted Jane Learned quickly, "but can you talk like a Dutch uncle to Mary Raftery, if she happens to need it? And can you impress Boss Smith with the fearful responsibility that's on his shoulders to look after both of the Rafterys and report to us if things go wrong?"

"Oh, I couldn't do all that!" gasped poor Lloyd.

"I'm afraid we couldn't make a big enough impression on them," agreed Margaret. "They'd think we were nothing but little girls."

Then up rose Miss Margery Dutton, trying hard to look tall and dignified and impressive, and succeeding only in looking very young, and very, very pretty, but well-poised also, and equal to any emergency.

"Do you think I could talk like a Dutch uncle?" she demanded gaily. "Or would a Dutch aunt cover the case? Do you think I

could impress Mary Raftery and her husband and Boss Smith—and the whole population of Camp Sixty-Nine, because it will probably need them all before long to look after Timmy—with his incalculable preciousness and the pains they must take with him as a presidential possibility, and incidentally as the dearest treasure of Fair Oaks School for Girls? Because my letter this morning was an invitation to join my friends, the Watsons, for a cruise up Lake Michigan, meeting them within a week at Pine Ridge. The invitation I'd already accepted, but the rendezvous hadn't been arranged until now. So, if you think you can let me play the part of the Dutch aunt, everything will be easily arranged."

Deafening applause greeted the conclusion of Miss Dutton's speech. The girls loved her because she was young and pretty and full of fun; they respected her because she made friends without losing a bit of her dignity; and they admired her because she was equal to every emergency, from getting a dormitory dinner when Cook scalded her arm, to lecturing before learned societies, and "making a tremendous hit," to quote Jane Learned, with all the lions that Miss Marshall lured to Fair Oaks to edify her lambs. Fair Oaks had no doubt about Miss Dutton's ability to play Dutch aunt when she wanted to.

As for Lloyd and Margaret, they were both trained baby-tenders,—having graduated with honor from the course. There was no doubt, then, about their ability to perform what they had suggested. But pangs of envy shot through the heart of nearly every other girl in the gym.

"I wish I lived out there!" sighed a supercilious Boston maiden, who had been heard to boast that she had never traveled west of Fair Oaks; and her wish was echoed by all the rest. But nobody wished she "lived out there" with quite so desperate a pang of hopeless longing as Nancy Lee.

Timmy was her baby. She had found him and brought him to Fair Oaks and now somebody else was to take him home. She had been chosen to break the news to the Enchanted Castle. Then she must pack and go home like any other girl, while Lloyd and Margaret, those lucky Westerners, could take all the care of darling Timmy for a whole long glorious day, a whole dark night, and half a day more at least. Nobody knew how one got to Camp Sixty-Nine or how long it took. It might be necessary for Lloyd and Margaret to stay another day or two in Pine Ridge, until Miss Dutton had investigated the situation, played Dutch aunt if necessary, and decided that it was proper for Timmy to stay. And if she decided

that he shouldn't stay, perhaps they could bring him back to the Princess and the real Prince. It was glorious! And it wasn't for Nancy. She was going home—it took three hours—with a cheque for father's forty-nine dollars and sixty-five cents in her hand-bag. She could go on the summer trip, she supposed. Father always planned lovely trips, and the house up in Maine, where they would go in a week or so, was all sorts of fun. And Nancy loved her family. But just now she could think of nothing but the proud privilege that was denied her of taking Timmy Lee Marshall to his mother.

All through the graduation exercises Nancy thought about it, wriggling and twisting in her seat in a restless fashion quite unlike her; and the minute the program was over she slipped off, disregarding Jane's frantic signals and Grace's lifted brows, and ran over to the dormitory and up to her study. Of course she couldn't go home with Timmy. But she had neglected to tell her family what train she was coming on next afternoon. She would do that now, in a special delivery letter, instead of waiting to telegraph, as father had suggested she might, if it was more convenient. Incidentally she would write about Timmy, of course. And if father or mother understood, as they did wonderfully sometimes, though on other

occasions they woefully failed to catch any of the deeper meanings hidden between the lines of their daughter's rather scrawly letters,—why, perhaps—Nancy dared not put her hope into words. Resolutely, having despatched her letter and therein done her best, she determined not to worry, and threw herself with zest into the tumultuous program of her afternoon. This included much packing at lightning speed, many leisurely good-byes, final conferences with the twins, Grace, and Plain Mary about their possible visits to her in Maine, an interview, accompanied by Timmy, with the Prince and Princess, who won her heart afresh by their disappointment at losing the Finest Baby, and by their prompt decision to delay a projected wedding journey for a final frolic with him. His mother, the Princess declared, couldn't love him much more than she did.

"But she probably needs him more, because she hasn't all the other things you have," said Nancy, in such a sorrowful voice that the Princess asked anxiously if getting up in time for the dewy wedding had been too much for her.

"Oh, no," said Nancy. "It's only—Timmy."

And the Princess nodded understandingly and hugged her hard for good-bye, when the frolic with Timmy was over.

"I had the fun of getting him. I ought to

want those others to have the fun of taking him home," Nancy told herself. "But then, they could have it just the same if I had it too."

Nancy had really forgotten Timmy for a while in the perplexities of packing, and she certainly was not expecting so quick an answer to her letter, when, just before dinner, Mary Ann, solemn and red-eyed, bustled up-stairs with a telegram. It was from father. "If $49.65 pretty nearly covers it, go ahead and see that baby home."

Nancy sat down so hard on her trunk that wouldn't shut that the recalcitrant cover slipped instantly into place. "Oh, Mary Ann," she said, reading the short message through again slowly; "I'm going to help take Timmy home—maybe. How much does it cost to get to Michigan?"

"Indade, I'd feel safer if you went along, miss," said Mary Ann. "Them other two ain't learned how to keep the child contented like you and me can. But it costs a good deal, miss, to go way out to them forest-places."

"I must find out this minute." Nancy flew off to consult the resourceful Miss Dutton, who, having just paid for her own ticket to Pine Ridge, explained to Nancy that she could make the round trip easily within her limit.

"Oh, Miss Dutton!" Nancy cried. "Then I'm

going too! I couldn't be trusted with Timmy alone, because I'm so careless ; but Mary Ann says that I'm one of the best to keep him amused. And there'll be lots of that to do."

"Lots," agreed Miss Dutton. "We shall all be glad to have you come."

Lloyd and Margaret were delighted at Nancy's news.

"Things are always more fun if Nancy's there," said Lloyd.

"And then she specially belongs in this thing," added Margaret. "Did Miss Dutton tell you that we're all to stay over night with her friends?"

"Oh, but ——" began Nancy.

"It's all right," Lloyd explained. "Mrs. Watson thought six girls were coming, when she asked us. The message must have been mixed somehow."

"The last minute for mine! It pays to wait," sang Jane, when Nancy told her. "That's evidently your motto, N. Lee, and it seems to be Mrs. Raftery's. I hope she's as nice as you and me, who share her noble sentiments about last moments. I say, N. Lee, try not to go off and forget Timmy or yourself or any other important article."

Nancy laughed. "I'm trying not to feel proud," she said, "because I certainly had a fall that other time when I got rather vain. And I'm never

going to pack until the very last minute. I shall have to muss up my whole trunk now, getting out things I need for the Timmy trip."

And Nancy departed precipitately to repack. But first she went down to say a private farewell to Miss Marshall.

"Do I stop being on probation now, Miss Marshall?" she asked. She had come down earlier in the day, to secure Miss Marshall's sanction for joining the Pine Ridge party; but there had been others around then, and Nancy had not been able to discuss the probation matter, which she had taken very much to heart, and wished to have definitely settled.

Miss Marshall smiled at her quizzically. "You've kept the terms of the bond, haven't you? No more red circles for—— Did I say for the rest of the term, Nancy?"

"I'm not sure," said Nancy, blushing. "It's dreadful to forget an important point like that, isn't it?"

Miss Marshall smiled again. "Well, I meant for the rest of the term," she said. "So no extra penalties will descend upon you unexpectedly, if you forget next year. But I expect you to keep trying, Nancy."

Nancy considered solemnly. "Why, that's a kind of probation, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Miss Marshall, "the kind that makes us all amount to a little something—because our friends believe in us and expect us to succeed. Now run and finish that all-to-do-over packing. And be sure to come back to us in the fall."

Up-stairs Lloyd was waiting to speak to Nancy. "Somebody else is coming with us to Pine Ridge," she explained. "It's Jeanne Durand. I found that she has no place to spend her summer—her uncle travels, it seems, and she'd be very lonely, boarding in New York while he is off on his trips. She won't begin her teaching before fall anyway, so I've invited her to visit me now." Lloyd blushed violently. "If she asks you, Nancy, please try to let her think that visits in America begin when you get on the train. Father would like me to pay for both tickets—he's told me that he'd rather I spent more money. I'm afraid I almost told her that it was customary to pay your guest's fare in America."

"You dear!" Nancy danced in a mad whirl of ecstasy around her hapless trunk. "Wouldn't it be great if everybody we like could go home with Timmy?"

But Jeanne, delighted with her newest experience of American hospitality, was positively the last accession to Timmy's guard of honor.

The next afternoon, laden with "a bushel of toys and more than a bushel of advice," to quote Jane Learned, and escorted by all the Fair Oaks girls who had been ingenious enough to invent excuses for delaying their own departures until after Timmy's, the Timmy-party started on its proud journey.

Nancy was the butt of endless jibes and warnings.

"We couldn't have trusted you with our precious package."

"Don't lose any of the lovely toys we've brought for Timmy."

"And don't carelessly find another baby. Miss Cripps is the one to do that, remember, in case the Rafterys and 'Jno.' Smith can support Timmy without our help."

Nancy nodded gaily at Miss Cripps, who was evidently delighted with her commission—she was going to Boston at once to make a preliminary investigation—and blew on the biggest of Timmy's six horns for silence.

"Three cheers for Timmy," she suggested. "You know you're all glad I found him, no matter how much you try to tease."

To Jane, Nancy confided her latest discovery about the human mind. "When you've got one thing that you've wanted awfully, you want an-

other. For instance, I'm going to help take Timmy home—now, Jane, you needn't repeat that silly joke about my not being trusted to wrap him up for the parcel post, because I'm tired of it. The point is, I wanted most awfully to help take Timmy home, and now that I've got that wish, why, I wish he didn't have to go home! Fair Oaks won't seem half as nice next fall."

"There'll be the substitute baby, perhaps."

"Jane!" Nancy's voice thrilled with disdain.

"Well," said Jane calmly, "of course we twins never did try two years at any little old school, but we're planning to come back here. That's a slight recommendation, but you're welcome to it."

The train they were to take puffed noisily to a stop, and Nancy picked up the great basket of toys that was her present share of the responsibility of Timmy.

"Of course there's the summer first," continued Jane placidly. "Anything may happen in a summer. Doesn't Sarah expect a final hug to carry her happily home to her beloved Annette?"

Nancy ran to the little girl, who was not going on the train with Timmy's party, and Jane grinned wickedly.

"Board!" shouted the conductor of Nancy's

train nonchalantly. These rattle-brained school crowds bored him.

"Hurry, Nancy! Miss I-Forgot again!" shrieked teasing Jane joyously, making a grab at Nancy's big bundle and rushing her to the platform, where Lloyd and Jeanne stood, their eyes searching distractedly through the crowd for their tardy friend.

Nancy sprang lightly up beside them, disappeared for a moment, and returned with Timmy in her arms.

The girls in the station waved and cheered, as the train pulled out. The girls on the platform waved back, and Timmy, pleased with the commotion, grinned and waved both arms.

"Better come in, girls," cautioned Miss Dutton, after a minute; and Nancy, steadied by Margaret, returned Timmy to his snug corner and presented him with the block of wood that was his favorite plaything. The new toys could be tried at less critical moments.

Then Nancy leaned over the baby to take a last look at Fair Oaks, nestled cozily among its green hills.

"It's been a great term," she said, straightening up and turning to the others. "I wish it could begin to-morrow and go right over again. But perhaps this summer will be just as good fun. It's

certainly starting well. Oh, girls, isn't Timmy Lee Marshall a cherub, and aren't you glad we can take him home?"

"Ummm," agreed Timmy Lee Marshall, smiling rapturously at his favorite toy.

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